

# Power Rangers Alpha

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*In 2005 Angel Grove and the Power Coins are out there, broken, awaiting their other halves. When Roki and Zita Repulsa take residence in the Palace on the Moon six ordinary young people find themselves in the middle of a Z Putty attack. They become Power Rangers. It is then up to them to complete the other halves of their coins and defend the world against Evil.*

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# 1 - The New Hope

## **Angel Grove, California, 2006**

The Angel Grove Youth Center had come under new management a few years ago when a young man named Winter Baker and his grandmother, Mai bought it. They began to remodel it saving it from mediocrity. They restored its insides to the former glory. Within six months the doors had opened and people began to trickle back in. Not only was the Juice bar reopened, selling food as well as drinks, coffees and teas, but they also had an arcade, theater room, and areas for martial arts and gymnastics training.

Autumn Baker, fresh faced and recently graduated from Reefside High, had come to join her brother that summer and was working on her own artistic brand of decorations. Power Rangers. All the teams Angel Grove had known, drawn in her own hand, adorned cups, plates, containers and the walls.

Winter was a tall, lean man that was well toned and active. He had warm brown eyes and slightly messy brown hair. Autumn was also on the tall side, but softly curved. She shared her brother's brown eyes but her hair was red and cut into a cute flippy bob. Both siblings were often found wearing green camo and combat boots.

Though summer was coming to a close, they were still very busy during the day. Kids of all ages came not only to eat, but to work out, play video games or just hang with friends. The Youth Center was becoming a source of pride for both siblings and their Nanna.

Tai Stapleton walked into the Youth Center, carrying a long, slightly curved metallic red stick. Well, actually, it wasn't a stick, it was a katana forged by his own hand, with his grandfather's help. Tai was a tall, skinny not-completely-Asian-featured kid with dark brown eyes with the barest glints of red with spiky dark brown hair. He'd been off training and was on his way home. He'd decided to stop by the Youth Center for a cool drink.

He walked to the counter. He nodded slightly to the Bakers. "Ice tea," he ordered quietly. He wasn't usually big on words. He looked around as Winter went to fill his order. He knew most of the people that were around his age.

Sitting at a computer was the smartest girl at Angel Grove High, seventeen year old Wilhelmina Davis, and better known as Billie. She had honey colored blond hair, pulled into braided pigtails with bangs cut at an odd angle. She wore light blue glasses and her blue eyes were narrowed behind them as her fingers flew over the keyboard. "Just one more minute," she said to herself with a frown of sheer concentration.

Nathan Doyle watched her in reluctant fascination as he chewed on a Twizzler. He had no idea what she was doing and he wasn't sure it was fun judging by the look on her face. He was hoping any moment Wood would come through the door. He was older than his three closest friends. He'd been held back during the fourth grade because of his grades. When everyone else made fun of him for it, Wood and Danny and by extension Billie stood up for him and they'd been together ever since.

Nathan was what was termed emo. He wore pink converses, faded black jeans with a studded belt and a baggy tee-shirt with some obscure band splashed over the front. His naturally black hair was a little too long and his fringe fell over his eyes. "Gliiiiitch. What are you doing?" he demanded with an exaggerated sigh.

"Can it, emo-boy," she said. "If I told you, I'd have to kill you. And what did I tell you about calling me Glitch?" she said, though a slight smile softened her remark.

Nathan grinned. He saw a flash of yellow outside and grinned again when he saw Wood's scooter parking. "Finally, here comes Wood," he said.

Wood Johnson was a cute black kid on the short side with freckles, smiling brown eyes and dreads. He walked into the Youth Center and waved to Autumn. She smiled and waved back.

"What's going on now?" Wood asked as he sat down near Nathan and Billie.

Nathan shrugged. "Beats me," he said.

Winter served Tai his tea. "Where's your other half?" he asked with a smile.

Tai didn't need to ask who Winter was referring to. "Off being Perfect I guess," he answered without rancor and grinned.

Rex Hart stomped in. Well, limped in. "Speak of the devil," Tai remarked. That earned him a glare. Rex was average tall boy with stylish black hair, dark eyes with the barest hints of gold and a fit body. He was not having a good day. He sat at the counter. "Give me the chocolatiest thing on the menu," he ordered.

Autumn raised her brows as she overheard that order. "Oh, my. Are you, ok, Rex?" she asked in concern and set about making him a triple chocolate sundae. With the training regimen the younger boy had, even she knew that something like that was not the usual.

Rex grunted. Tai cleared his throat. He and Rex went back to diapers. Rex trained along beside Tai in Bushido. Rex also trained in gymnastics, played various sports and was in a band. There was a reason Tai called him Mr. Perfect. "That bad, huh?" he asked.

Rex grunted again. He waited until he shoveled several mouthfuls of chocolate down his throat before speaking.

Wood whistled. "Wow. Rex Hart shoveling down ice cream. He almost looks like you, Nathan," he told his friend with a grin.

Nathan groaned. Wood was one of the few people who knew just how true that statement was. Nathan had been gymnastics for years. He and Rex often came up against each other at competitions.

Billie snickered but went back to what she was doing.

Rex got tired of Tai staring at him patiently. "Fine. I got kicked out of the band. I lost my contract to be in that video for Ivy Black. I fell down the stairs leaving the studio and hurt my knee. Lost my wallet somewhere along the way. Then on the bus over, some old pervert kept staring at me and to top it off, I'm eating this thing," he jabbed the ice cream with his spoon then continued eating it.

Tai actually managed not to laugh at his friend. "Wow. Sorry, dude. I know how much you were looking forward to the video," he said supportively.

Suddenly Billie gave a whoop of delight. "I did it! I won the laptop!" she declared.

Nathan looked at her and slapped a hand over his face. "All that for a laptop?"

"Don't you already have a laptop?" Wood ventured.

Billie frowned at them. "This isn't just any laptop. For hacking into the firewall of the Nodroz Corporation and helping them pinpoint weaknesses, I won a state of the art laptop that is light years ahead of this one," she said and checked the time. "I have to go to the park and meet the girl giving it to me. You guys want to come?" she asked, closing up her laptop.

"Yeah, because we're going to let you meet some strange person from the internet in the park by yourself," Nathan said and rolled his eyes.

Wood shook his head. "Like that would happen, Billie," he said.

Billie didn't remark. She took her laptop to Autumn and asked her to watch it for her.

Autumn gave her a smile. "Sure thing. You be careful," she admonished.

Billie gave a nod. She met Nathan and Wood at the door and the three of them walked out together.

Rex finished off his ice cream with a groan. "Oh man. I shouldn't have done that," he said and rubbed his face.

Tai snickered. "You think?" That earned him a dark scowl. He merely smiled. "Come on. Let's go work it off. We haven't sparred in a while," he said.

Rex nodded. "Good idea," he said. The two of them settled their tab and left the Youth Center as well.

Winter noticed Autumn biting on her bottom lip worriedly. "What is it, Tum?" he asked her.

She cringed slightly. "I'm...not sure." she admitted.

"If you want to go after them to make sure their ok, it is your break time," he said helpfully.

She gave a start then smiled at him. "A walk in the park would be a good idea," she said and gave him a jaunty wave and scurried out the door. She might be overreacting, but something about Billie's online

thing seemed very fishy. Very fishy indeed.

-x-

A young man entered what seemed to an abandoned high tech facility. The area had seen better days, Not only did it appear as though it survived a war, but layers of dust covered everything. Billy Cranston shook his head. It was sad the place in such a state. "Ah, the great Command Center. What has become of you?" he mused quietly to himself.

Billy had spent the past few years on Aquitar. He was essentially ageless; he still looked no more than eighteen even though he had a family and a career there. He would be unable to stay on Earth for more than a year, but he had waited until his daughters were old enough to be without him for a time.

Several weeks ago he registered a disturbance recorded by the Command Center of the Power Rangers. It had taken that long to pack and make the trip. There was only one thing that would set off the Command Center's all but defunct security system after so long.

There was activity in the Palace on the Moon. He'd taken scans from his ship as he passed by and sure enough, there was activity. What that meant, however, he wasn't sure.

He spun around, hand going for the Aquitarian weapon strapped to his hip when he heard a noise.

"Billy?" Walking quietly through the Command Center was a young woman in her late twenties. She had distinct Asian features and her hair pulled up into buns on either side of her head. She wore a khaki skirt and a sedate yellow blouse. "It is you!" Trini Kwan declared.

Billy grinned. "Trini!" he said and rushed forward to envelope her.

"About time you two got here. I thought I was going to have to wait forever," a third voice intruded on their reunion. The blond youth and young woman looked around. The voice was familiar to them both but they didn't see anyone.

"Jason?" Billy asked.

A not quite tall man in his late twenties somehow managed to squeeze his bulk out of a small confined space in one wall. "Sorry, guys. I was after something," he said. He had dark brown hair and eyes and wore dark jeans and a tight red tee-shirt.

Trini beamed. "What are guys doing here?" she asked.

Jason Scott put the case on a cluttered console. "I've been in town for a couple of months opening a new Scott Dojo," he said. "I've been poking around the old place. I was here when it recorded the disturbance," he said looked at Billy meaningfully.

Trini put her hand on her hip. "And here I was feeling nostalgic since I've moved back to work at the high school," she said, watching Jason.

Billy gave her a smile. "Everything happens for a reason," he assured her. "Jason is that what I think it is?" he asked, watching the first ever Red Power Ranger trying to find an opening to the case.

Jason gave him an enigmatic smile. "I have a feeling they might be needed," he said and finally opened the case. The case housed six broken coins. Well, it was supposed to. "Half of each one is missing," he said.

"What?!" Billy and Trini said at once and rushed forward to see for themselves that indeed, half of each coin was missing.

-x-

Billie, Nathan and Wood walked through the park. She was supposed to meet her contact near a vendor of hokey native jewelry. She surveyed the area. "I don't see her," she complained.

"What does she look like?" Wood asked so that he could keep a look out as well.

"Kinda cute Asian girl. I don't know. I'll recognize her when I see her," she answered absently.

"Big help," Nathan complained. That earned him a narrow eyed frown. His response was a guileless grin at her. Wood looked at the sky as if beseeching patience.

Tai and Rex were taking a shortcut through the park when the first of the screams started. Both young men stopped and looked around. Gray humanoid creatures were setting on people in the park. Large golden Z's adorned their chests.

"What on earth?" Tai gaped.

"Are those what I think they are?" Rex demanded.

"Doesn't matter. We have to help," Tai said and drew his sword from its sheath. The blade gleamed in the California sun. He tossed the sheath to Rex.

Though it seemed solid, Rex managed to stretch the sheath out into a small bo staff. They nodded to each other and jumped into the fray, protecting a nanny with a stroller from several of the featureless creatures.

Autumn watched the Z Putties surround Billie, Nathan and Wood. "Oh no," she said and rushed forward, years of karate training with her brother kicking in. She began to kick and hit Putties left and right.

Billie's eyes widened to impossible degrees as the faceless creatures. "Are you guys seeing this or is my caffeine levels getting low?" she asked them.

Wood took a fighting stance. He didn't really have any formal training but he wasn't the kid brother of Theodore Jay Jarvis Johnson without learning a thing or two. "Stay behind us, Billie," he said.

Nathan nodded. He wouldn't say he was a fighter but being considered that queer emo kid often called

for some degrees of self-defense.

Z Putties pounced on the three teenagers. As Nathan and Wood began to engage them, Billie tried to scramble away. However, Billie was about as graceful as three-legged elephant. She stumbled back, and stepped wrong on an exposed root under a shading tree. She yelped as she fell to the ground.

She tried to scramble to her feet and ended up picking something up in her hand. Unfortunately, a Z Putty thought her inelegant sprawl was prime opportunity to attack her. She watched in horrified slow motion as it approached. There was a glint of metal and the Z Putty slide in half and disintegrated.

Tai now stood over her with a sword. He held a hand down to her. "I owe you a month of homework, Tai," she declared and took his hand.

Tai nodded as he hefted her to her feet. He spun quickly and took out several more Z Putties.

Rex and Autumn joined the little group now as Z Putties continued to surround them. "Smooth moves," Rex told Autumn with a wink.

She shook her head at him. "Thanks," she remarked. As one the five of them, with Billie in their center attacked the Putties again.

-x-

Deep within the Command Center, a bit of life spark as a flickering viewer begins to glow dimly. "Look! It's trying to show us something," Trini said and ran over to it and began to clean the dust off of it.

Billy moved over to it as well. He dusted off a panel near the viewer and used a tool from his belt to open it. He efficiently began to cross wires and boost the signal on the viewer.

"Putties!" Trini exclaimed as the scene in the park became clearer.

"Z Putties," Billy corrected. "Then it is as I feared. Roki and Zita are indeed taking up residence on the moon and following the evil footsteps of their parents," he said, shaking his head.

"Roki and Zita?" Trini asked.

Billy nodded. "They are the son and daughter of Rita Repulsa and Lord Zedd. My sources had informed me they were boarding on Onyx, but I suppose they're too old to be in a boarding school now. They seem to be just as evil as their parents used to be," he explained.

Jason was watching the scene on the view screen, nodding almost absently. "If I had my guess, I would say that our missing half coins are down there somewhere," he said thoughtfully.

Trini looked at the viewer again. "Billy. Teleport system," she said urgently. If Jason was right they would need it operational.

Billy didn't hesitate and began to look for the main hub for the teleport system.



-X-

Autumn found herself swarmed with Putties. "Man, I wish Win was here," she murmured to herself. Her momentary distraction earned a kick to the middle that sent her flying backwards. She lost her wind.

"Autumn!" Rex shouted and stepped in front of her to take down three Z Putties,

She sprang to her feet. She glanced momentarily at the greenish broken coin in her hand. She didn't have time to dwell, however, as Putties came at her again.

Rex nodded to himself when he saw that Autumn was back on her feet again. He broke through some Putties but one seemed rather aggressive. He gave a grin began to mimic its movements. This confused such a mindless creature and Rex kicked it in the chest.

Z Putties piled on top of him, pinning him down. "Argh!" came his muffled voice in the center of the pile.

Wood, surprisingly agile and scrappy made his way over and jumped into the fray, helping Rex gain some breathing room. When they both came up they each held a shard of metal they didn't have time to investigate.

"Where do they keep coming from?" Nathan demanded and yelped when a putty rolled under his feet and knocked him off balance. He sprang back up almost immediately, and he, too, had a metal shard.

"There! That girl! That's the girl who was supposed to give me my laptop!" Billie shouted suddenly.

Exactly where she was meant to be a pretty Asian featured with cutesy pigtails and dressed in Gothic Lolita held a black laptop open. She was the only person who seemed unfazed by all the putties running around.

Distracted by the girl, a Putty was able to hit Tai in the back and knock him down. He gritted his teeth and clenched his hands. One hand wrapped around the hilt of his sword, the other hand a piece of metal. He got to his feet and began to go through the Putties toward the girl.

They were within feet of each other. She gave him a cool smirk and closed the laptop and vanished in a haze of gray smoke. The remaining Z Putties disappeared as well. He looked down at the piece of metal he picked up. He suddenly felt a strange lurch and red light flashed briefly in front of his eyes.

He blinked when he realized they were all in a completely new place. A dark place that looked somewhat like a dilapidated science facility.

The other five were looking around just as blankly. Tai was the first to spot the three people around the viewer. A blond kid that didn't look any older than them, a cute Asian lady and "Jason Scott?" he said out loud. There were very few in martial arts circles who didn't know Jason Lee Scott. Not only did he still compete, but he had dojos in Stone Canyon and Turtle Cove. He was a bit of hometown hero and he had landed here a couple of months ago to open his third Scott Dojo in his hometown.

He was also a friend of Rex's older cousin and had been idolized by most kids around their age twelve years earlier.

Jason gave a sly smile. "My reputation precedes me," he said with a chuckle.

Autumn sniggered. "You could say that," she agreed.

Trini sighed. "Because becoming a science teacher is a lot less glamorous than the famous Jason Lee Scott," she teased him.

Billie crossed her arms over her chest. "Well I have no idea who you are. Where are we?" she demanded as she looked around.

Billy held his arms open. "This is the Power Rangers Command Center. I brought you all here so that we can figure out how to work to the metal shards you each found," he said.

Wood looked the shard in his hand then around. "No way! You're telling me this is half of a Power Coin? Sweet!" he said and looked around with knew eyes. "The original Command Center. Amazing," he said and began to run around checking everything out.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Wood," he said. It was no secret really that Wood's older brother was TJ Johnson, the Blue Astro Ranger.

Wood stopped gaping with a sheepish grin.

"Tai, I know that dude and that chick. They're friends of Kim's Trini Kwan and an amazingly well preserved Billy Cranston," Rex said. He looked at the coin shard in his hand. He chuckled, "I knew it. Kim was a Power Ranger, wasn't she?" he asked.

Jason chuckled. "Little Rexy Hart. Nothing gets by you, does it? What coin you got there?" he asked.

Rex looked at the shard again. "Mastodon," he announced. The coin dissolved into his hand and metallic black cuffs appeared around his wrists. "Whoa," he said and fingered the nearly weightless metal.

Wood gaped again. "I want to try that!" he announced and studied his coin. "Awesome! Smilodon!" The coin dissolved into his hand and metallic yellow cuffs appeared around his wrists. Trini beamed at him and he grinned at her.

Autumn bit her lip and looked at the coin. "Stygimoloch," she whispered almost reverently. The coin shard dissolved into her hand and metallic green cuffs appeared around her wrists.

Nathan looked at them all dubiously then glanced at his coin shard. "Pterodactyl," he said. The coin dissolved into his hand and pink cuffs appeared around his wrists.

Billie snickered. "Only Nathan would be the world's first male pink Power Ranger," she declared.

Nathan smirked. "What do you have over there then, Glitch?" he demanded.

"Well obviously it's the Triceratops," she answered and her coin shard dissolved into her hand and metallic blue cuffs appeared around her wrists.

"Indubitably," Billy stated with a nod of approval. She, however, was a little green.

Jason looked at Tai, who was also a bit green and staring down into his hand. "Say it, rookie," he coaxed. Tai shook his head. "It chose you for a reason, kid. Say it," he added quietly.

Tai looked up from the coin shard to find all eyes on him. He swallowed. "Tyrannosaurus-Rex," he said and the coin shard dissolved into his hand and metallic red cuffs appeared around his wrists. "Now what?" he said.

Billy cleared his throat. "First a little history. The tale starts twelve years ago when Rita Repulsa was freed from a dumpster on the moon by a couple of hapless astronauts. Our mentor, Zordon, asked his assistant Alpha 5 to find him five teenagers with attitude to become the Earth's first Power Rangers."

-x-

## Moon Palace

In what was once Rita Repulsa and Lord Zedd's own throne room, a tall, athletic Asian-featured man lounged in the seat that had once belonged to his father. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "What was the point of that?" he asked his sister as returned.

Zita Repulsa looked at her brother, Roki with a slight smirk. "Just letting them know the Moon Palace hasn't been completely abandoned," she said. "Plus when I realized I wouldn't be able to piggyback the virus into the Nodroz Corporation's systems, I may have lost my temper," she admitted.

He managed a small smirk. "So what's your next move?" he asked and glanced at her curiously.

Zita opened the laptop's DVD drive and placed a clay disk inside of it. She pushed the door closed. The laptop trembled and turned into a monster. "Virustron. Go back to the park. Infect everyone you see," she ordered with a smirked.

"With pleasure, mistress," he said and disappeared.

Roki got to his feet and moved to an ancient spyglass and peaked through it. "Hmm. I don't like that Thrax disappeared before we could join him," he said finally.

Zita gave a shrug. "Maybe it's time to learn to do things without big brother," she said and played with the coin hanging around her neck by a chain.

Roki nodded. "You are correct," he said and gave another slight smirk. "Wish us luck," he said. She grinned wickedly in agreement.

-x-

Winter was checking the time, wondering what could be keeping Autumn when people began to run by the Youth Center. Several other patrons noticed the activity. Winter hopped the counter and ran out the door, stopping some guy running past. "Hey, what's going on?" he demanded.

"There's a monster in the park!" the guy answered and pulled away. Winter paled then darted inside. "Nanna! I'm taking a break!" he shouted and ran toward the park. Sure enough, there was monster that resembled a mish mash of computer equipment. "It looks like Danny Kennedy's garage threw up," he said to himself. "Autumn?" he called over the noise of the crowd, trying to find his sister.

-x-

The six teens absorbed the tale they were told. Even Wood had to admit, hearing things from the inside was serious. And seriously awesome.

Tai listened quietly without speaking. He saw Jason give a nearly invisible start then went to the viewer and turned it on. "Just as we feared. There is now a monster in park," he stated. "Proving time, rookies. Up to the challenge?" he asked them.

Autumn gasped as she saw her brother on the viewing screen. "Oh, no," she said quietly.

"Just one question," Rex said and looked at his cuffs.

"How do we work them?" Nathan finished.

"Watch me," Wood said. Naturally while everyone was listening to the tale of Zordon and the Power Rangers, he was working out how to activate the Morphs. He gave his wrists a twist and the cuffs vanished. He gave his wrists another twist. "It's Morphin' Time! Smilodon!" He brought his wrists together.

Tai nodded and repeated the actions.

"Tyrannosaurus Rex!"

"Triceratops!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Mastodon!"

"Stygimoloch!"

Six new Power Rangers stood in the Command Center. Their suits had familiar diamond patterns and yet they were different and their helmets had been updated. The mouth-pieces weren't inset metallic silver.

"Good luck everyone," Trini stated.

They nodded. They activated their own teleports. All except the Green Ranger.

Jason raised a brow at her. Then he smiled. "Do it." he assured her before she could even explain herself.

-x-

Virus tron left a wake of twitching, frothing people behind him. "My mistress will be pleased," he said and rubbed his hands together. He came upon a young man who seemed to be looking for someone. "Hello there, little boy. Can I help you?" he asked in a cajoling tone.

Winter jumped back and took up a fighting stance.

Before Virus tron could blast him, he got a blow to his webcam eye. A blue handled Sai protruded from his face. "Argh!" he screamed.

"Way to go, Glitch," the Black Ranger said to the Blue Ranger approvingly.

The Pink Ranger nodded his approval. "Our Glitch has always had a dead aim," he said.

Blue Ranger held a second Sai in her hand. "Next person who calls me Glitch will get this," she hissed.

"Enough chitchat," Red Ranger warned as Virus tron managed to pull the Sai from his eye and turned on them with a roar.

"You will regret that!" he said and charged toward them.

"Power Daggers!" the Yellow Ranger sprang forward and kept on going, jumping completely over him and landing in a crouch. "Whoa! Not quite what I intended," he said.

"Power Bow!" Pink Ranger summoned a bow and shot Virus tron. The monster spun on him and sent an energy attack his way. "Yikes!" He jumped and hung there a moment, flailing in surprise before losing it and falling to the ground.

"Power Scythe!" Black Ranger made a black handled scythe appear and spun it like a bo before rushing forward to slash at Virus tron.

Blue Ranger saw her Sai laying abandoned. She wanted to get to it without attracting attention but she didn't know how. It was then that she realized she couldn't see herself. She dashed over and picked it up. "We need to..." she trailed off tapping her helmet. A holographic computer appeared in front of her and the front of her visor suddenly lit up with data. "Oh, my god," she said and began to analyze the scene.

Win was looking around flabbergasted. The Green Ranger suddenly appeared in front of him. She blinked a few times to clear her vision before he was surrounded by a glowing green aura. "You were brave, civilian," she said in a deep, affected voice. The front of her helmet suddenly popped open to

reveal his sister's face to him.

"Autumn! What?"

She grinned at him and took his hand. He felt only briefly cool metal before green metallic cuffs appeared around his wrists. "Stygimoloch," she told him.

"Stygimoloch?" he repeated blankly. Green energy spread over his entire body making a male version of her suit appear. She winked at him before her helmet closed up. "Let's do it," she said. "Power Staff!"

"Stygian Dagger!"

The two siblings jumped as one and broke their weapons across Virustron's back.

He screamed and sparked. Yellow Ranger jumped again, aiming better, hitting him with each of his Power Daggers.

Red Ranger didn't have to summon a weapon. It had morphed with him. He drew his sword.

"Tai! He has a weakness on the left of his chest," Blue Ranger instructed him.

Red Ranger nodded and rushed forward and with a burst of strength he never felt before and slashed forward.

The sword hit home and he jumped back. Virustron screamed, sparking madly. "This isn't over! You haven't seen the last of me!" he screamed and exploded.

In the aftermath of the explosion, the only thing left was a broken laptop. Zita appeared and picked it up. She frowned at them. "You broke it," she hissed at them before disappearing again.

"Will someone please tell me what's going on?" the male Green Ranger demanded.

Red nodded. "Follow us. Welcome to the team," he said and teleported. The others followed.

-x-

After explaining things to Winter and the other Rangers left, Billie and Billy were the only ones left at the Command Center. She surveyed the place. She sent the older Billy a smile. "I'm afraid software is more my thing. I know someone, though, that can help get this place back to its former glory," she said.

"You're partner?" he asked.

Billie rubbed her hands together. "When I get through with him," she agreed with a grin. Billy wasn't so sure he liked that grin but nodded anyway.

He could wait to see what she had in mind. This fight had only just begun after all.



## 2 - Black & Blue

Winter hung up the phone at the Youth Center and sent his sister a smile. "That was Zack Taylor. He'll be here tomorrow. Not only has he agreed to teach a class on his mix of hip-hop of martial arts, he also agreed to be a Youth Center grunt for awhile," he explained.

Autumn grinned. "Sweet," she said. She was in a rather good mood as she served a couple of sixth graders some chili cheese fries.

"Would that be the famous Zack Taylor who coordinates and choreographs fight and dance scenes on some of the best blockbusters to come out of Hollywood this decade?" asked the customer behind the kids. He was a tall lean man with shirt scruffy brown hair and he wore a pair of sunglasses.

Autumn looked up at him and her eyes bulged. "Dr. O?" she asked. It was strange, to say the least, to suddenly be looking at her science teacher, especially when she graduated and left the entire school behind.

Tommy Oliver smiled at Autumn. "Miss Baker. One of my favorite students. I'd heard your brother had bought and breathed life back into this place," he said. He gave her a wink. "I heard a few other things as well," he added.

Winter had wandered closer. "Dr. O," he greeted. "What, er, exactly have you heard?" he asked.

"That there are new Power Rangers in Angel Grove," he answered. "I'm in kind of a rush, but I will catch up with you all later. I just need a coffee. Black, sugar. Large. My transfer to Angel Grove was so sudden and my dig went on longer than I thought. I have a ton to do before school starts next week," he said and really did seem rushed and harried.

Autumn nodded and fixed his coffee.

He paid for it then paused before turning away. "I'm not sure how it all happened, but do the Green proud," he told them and walked out of the Youth Center.

The two of them gawked after him then glanced at each other. "You don't think Dr. O..." Autumn trailed off, not voicing that thought.

Win smiled. "You know, I think I do," he quipped. "Now get back to work," he said and snapped his fingers at her.

She scowled and tossed a straw at him.

Two teens entered the Youth Center and looked around. One of them was a tall, lean boy with light blue eyes and sandy blond hair that was cut short and had a natural sort of spike. He had silver rimmed glasses, wore beat up sneaks, ripped-at-the-knees stone washed jeans and a blue button down hanging



open over a white tank. The girl was much shorter though not really petit. She was on the slim side. She wore slim black boots, pink tights with a black tunic over them with a wide pink belt. Her hair was a few shades darker than the boy's. She had it braided into twin tails that reached her shoulders. Her eyes were wide and brown.

"There're ya friends, Danny. Tell them I said 'hey,'" Chloe Kennedy told her brother and moved off to sit with the cute girl sucking down a strawberry milkshake and doing a terrible job of pretending not to stare at Wood Johnson. "So transparent," she remarked. There were still traces of New York in her speech patterns. It would take a few weeks for that to wear off.

Victoria Williams flushed, her pale mocha colored cheeks turned dusky. "Pfft, no clue what you talking about," she denied flatly and turned her attention to her shake. Tori, as she was known, was a small, sprightly girl who adored boys, fashion and pink. She was of mixed race, a fact made obvious by the light aquamarine color of her eyes. Her long hair was dark brown but had a mix of highlights that ranged from red to almost gold. She grinned. "So dish. How was the Big Apple?" she encouraged.

Chloe smiled. She had met Tori eleven years earlier, when the girl and her Native American guardian Dawn Feather had moved to Angel Grove. It was also during the time Chloe and Danny's parents were getting their divorce. The two of them had been fast friends ever since they met when most of Chloe's were bailing on her. Every summer since, she and her brother stayed with their father in his home.

Since she knew Tori so well, Chloe could see that something was bothering her. The best thing she could do was distract her, so she went into detail about her less than glamorous New York lifestyle.

Danny approached Wood and Nathan where they were trying to show a group of eight year olds a dance move. "Ey. What, no hello?" he said loudly.

"Danny!" Wood said and grinned. "Why didn't you tell us you were back?" he demanded and extracted himself from the kid to clap his friend on the back several times.

"Probably trying to avoid the pounding," Nathan said and shot Danny a grin. "Cutting it a bit close, eh?" he asked.

Danny shrugged. "Had to wait around for a tournament. We hopped a plane soon as we had our trophies in hand," he answered. Like his sister, he spoke with an accent that would take awhile to drop.

Wood chuckled. "You talk like you had no doubt you'd win," he said.

"I didn't. Where's Billie? She finally find some girl friends and stop hanging around with you losers?" he asked.

Nath and Wood shared a look Danny couldn't quite read. Nathan shrugged. "She'll be around. She was looking forward to you coming back. Maybe you should find somewhere to hide," he suggested.

Wood snickered. "Yeah," he agreed.

Danny was flabbergasted. "Uh, yeah," he said. "So, I miss anything interestin' this summer?" he asked.

Wood and Nathan shared another look. Wood just grinned at him and Nathan got an enigmatic look on his face that was driving Danny up a wall. "What! Did I grow another head or somethin'?" he demanded. That only made Nathan and Wood laugh at him.

Autumn smiled as she watched the room. She was about to go on break, mainly to fetch Billie from the Command Center, when someone new walked up to the counter. He was an unfamiliar face, around Win's age and a strangely nice looking man. He was tall but well muscled through the arms and shoulders, his features weren't placeable right off so she would have settled to say Polynesian with a more Asian bent. Then again he had the deepest emerald eyes she'd ever seen. His dark hair was sticking up at odd angles but he made it work.

He gave her a sheepish smile. "Sorry to trouble you miss," he said with a faint Irish lilt to his words which surprised the hell out of Autumn. He showed her a hand drawn map. "My cousin drew this for me, but I can't make heads or tails of it. Do you know where the Ryder Building is?" he asked her.

Autumn looked at the map, appalled. "You poor thing. If you've been following this, you've probably been going around in circles," she said sympathetically. She gave him directions to the building he was looking for as if she were an Angel Grove native.

"Thanks, you're a lifesaver," he said and folded the map. "I will be sure to tell my cousin what I think of her map making skills," he said. He gave a jaunty wave and left the youth center.

Autumn chuckled. "I can't help but wonder who drew that poor man's map," she said to her brother. He grinned and shrugged.

-x-

Roki entered the lab that belonged to the servant Finster and shook his head at his sister. "Why are you trying to salvage that thing?" he asked her as she and ratty looking Finster tried repaired the laptop.

Zita looked at him. "Because. When he comes back online, everyone he infected with his virus will become mindless zombies who do our bidding. Was there something you needed?" she asked him.

"I was finishing unpacking. I was wondering if you'd seen the blueprints I was working on before we left Onyx," he answered.

Zita turned away and tried to appear innocent. "Which blue prints?" she asked a little too casually for his liking.

He narrowed his eyes. "The exoskeleton blueprints," he answered quietly.

"Oh, the ones with skeletal power suit? Erm...I may have used them as the basis of a curse I performed when we stopped at KO-35 for supplies," she answered and tried to ease out of the way.

Roki rubbed his forehead. "You went into my things?" he demanded.

Zita reached out and rubbed his arm. "Now calm yourself, brother. They were experimental. Think of it

this way, we have a chance to test the suit on someone expendable," she soothed him.

Roki gritted his teeth. "I suppose you have a valid point," he agreed. "How are you going to test it, though if you cursed someone on KO-35?" he demanded.

Zita clapped her hands together. "That's the best part! He's not on KO-35 anymore. He's on Earth now. Right where he'll be the most use," she said gleefully.

"Mistress. I have repaired Virustron," Finster said, interrupting them timidly.

Roki snorted at his sister and walked over to the laptop. He turned it on and typed in a lengthy bit of code.

"What are you up to?" she asked him.

"Just a few improvements to his programming," he answered absently. He executed the programming and stood back.

The laptop shuddered and transformed into a new and improved monster with a long lance-like blade weapon.

"Go, Virustron v.2. Infect more people. You, sister, test my brilliant design," he ordered and started for the throne room so he could watch things. Virustron disappeared. Zita grinned and rubbed the shadowy coin around her neck.

-x-

Sora van Zandt had finally arrived at the apartment building where he met with the landlord and was now settling into his new apartment. He had to go shopping soon. The clothes he was wearing were out of date and borrowed from his sensei.

A sudden pain sliced through his head and he felt a heavy weight around his neck. He reached up and took out from under the neckline of his shirt a silver coin attached to a leather thong. It usually gleamed but now it was shadowy. Blackness was overcoming his vision and soon he was aware of nothing at all.

-x-

Billie and Billy were at the Command Center. She'd been exploring and there was a door she wanted to get behind but couldn't. She started making her way back to the main area when she heard Billy call her name. She sped up and skidded into a halt, but the floor was slippery and she crashed into a console.

Billy winced in sympathy. "Virustron has been spotted in the park. This time, he has followers," he said and showed her Virustron v.2 and his zombies.

"Ah, man. Contact the others," she said. "I'll figure out a way to put him down for good," she stated. She twisted her wrists, making her cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

-X-

Tai nearly fell off the tall pole in the center of the pond that was in front and a little off to the side of the house he shared with his grandfather, Akira Watanabe. His wrists were beeping, snapping him out of his meditation. He twisted them. "Virustron has been spotted. Sending you coordinates now," Billy said.

"On my way," Tai said and teleported.

-X-

Rex was training with his sister in the basement of his house when his wrists started beeping.

"What's that noise?" Rena Hart demanded. She was barely fourteen and nosy as all hell.

"Nothing, Rat. Ten more reps," he told her and darted into the bathroom. He twisted his wrists to make his cuffs appear. He got the same message as Tai. He darted out. "Gotta go for awhile," he said to his sister and dashed upstairs, teleporting.

-X-

Chloe sighed, bored, and played with the end of her hair. Tori had run to the bathroom, but Chloe stayed behind to finish the shake she ordered a few minutes earlier. She would have to have been deaf, blind and dumb not to notice Danny's friends make a hasty exit without him. "What was their deal?" she asked as he approached her.

He shook his head. "Donno, but I'm gonna find out," he said. "Ey, Tori," he greeted when the little bundle of energy came back.

She gave him a smile and kissed his cheek. "Welcome home, Danny. Sorry, Chlo, I have to bail. DF needs me," she said and gave the Kennedy's a wave and bounced out the door.

Chloe sighed. "All right. Let's go find those friends of yours. I sense a mystery afoot," she announced.

Danny nodded. They walked out of the Youth Center. "I think I saw them run that way," he said, pointing. She nodded. She gestured for him to take the lead. He gave her a mocking bow and led the way down the street.

-X-

Virustron v.2 wasn't too surprised when Power Rangers began to appear around him. "Welcome to the showdown!" he crowed. "Go forth! Protect me," he ordered the infected zombies. People with eyes with green numbers racing madly across a black surface stepped forward to attack the Rangers.

"Glitch, can you figure out a way to help these people?" Red Ranger demanded as he drew his sword.

Blue Ranger tapped her helmet. "Just watch my back," she said and began to analyze the monster and the people he infected.

"How are we going to avoid hurting these people?" femme Green Ranger asked.

That was a good question and one Red Ranger didn't have a ready answer for as he began to try and defend himself against the attacking zombies.

Virus tron cackled. "There's nothing you can do," he said and began to wander away. He didn't expect an attack. Someone tackled him and someone else jumped on his back.

"Danny! Chloe!" Blue Ranger sputtered.

Black Ranger whistled. "I dibs Chloe," he said. As if on cue, the other half of his Power Coin appeared in his hand.

The Kennedy siblings found themselves thrown off Virus tron. Danny yelped and landed in a heap at the feet of the Blue Ranger. "For a smart guy, you are an idiot," she stated.

Danny gaped up at her. "Billie?" he asked. He automatically took the hand she reached down to him. He briefly felt a sliver of metal "Wha'?"

"Triceratops," she stated.

His eyes widened and a smile overtook his face. "Triceratops!" he said firmly. Blue energy formed his metallic blue cuffs before spreading over his body to form a male version of the Blue power suit. The male Blue Ranger got to his feet.

Chloe was flying through the air but the Black Ranger jumped up and caught her and they landed with a dual oomph. "Whoa, thanks," she said and smiled at him. She blinked when his helmet popped open. "Rex? Rex Hart?" she asked dumbly.

"Chloe Kennedy," he said with a grin. He took her hand and helped her to her feet. She felt a piece of metal briefly. "Mastodon," he urged with a grin.

"Mastodon," she repeated. Black energy formed her metallic before covering her body to form a female version of the black power suit. "Wow," she said.

He let go over her hand and turned back to the fight. "We have to find a way to separate him from his human shield," he said.

The male Green Ranger found himself in the ridiculous predicament of being faced with an old lady hurling herself at him and no chance to duck or dodge. Wishing she could just pass right through him, he braced himself for an impact that never came. The woman actually passed through him.

"And I thought seeing glowing people was odd," the femme Green Ranger remarked.

The new Blue Ranger held out his hands and felt them tingle. A faint bluish field appeared around some of the people advancing on the Rangers.

"Awesome," the Yellow Ranger declared. "I might be able to jump them," he said. "Power Daggers!" he made the daggers appear and jumped. Something large batted him out of the sky and sent him crashing into the ground feet away.

"Wood!" Pink Ranger shouted and ran toward him.

The Red Ranger gripped his sword as a newcomer to the battle holding a ridiculously large double bladed sword landed in a crouch between the Rangers and Virustron and his zombies. He wore was obviously a power suit, except it was armored in a grotesque simile of bones. Even his black helmet was a skull. A tattered blood red cloak billowed behind him.

"Well, this is new," the male Black Ranger declared.

"Go. Leave these Rangers to me. Your mistress has other plans for you," the Skeleton Ranger told the Virustron. The monster saluted and darted off, taking his zombies with him.

The femme Blue gave a grim nod of satisfaction. She ran over to check on the Yellow Ranger. "Wood," she said and tapped his helmet lightly.

"Jouguyz gedda lizens numba?" he asked groggily.

"License number?" the Pink Ranger asked, flabbergasted.

"Odabusat himme," he responded as he attempted to get to his feet.

The Skeleton Ranger paid the threesome no mind as the Red Ranger, Black Rangers, Green Rangers and male Blue Ranger surrounded him.

"We don't have time for this," Red Ranger said.

The Skeleton Ranger laughed. "Too bad. Now you all have to deal with...me," he faltered slightly on that last word. He shook his head. Something wasn't right. He staggered back and gripped his head with one hand. Pain throbbled through his head. "This isn't over," he said and teleported.

Red Ranger sheathed his sword. "Billie," he said and turned to where she and Pink Ranger were helping Yellow Ranger to his feet.

"Let's get him to the Command Center," she said. She and Pink Ranger teleported Yellow Ranger.

Red Ranger nodded. He looked at the male Blue and femme Black. "New kids, follow us," he said and the six of them teleported as well.

-x-

They arrive unmorphed at the Command Center. "This way," Trini told Billie and Nathan and directed them to something that resembled a bed. Nath laid Wood on it. Trini turned it on. "Medi-bed," she

explained. "He'll be fine a couple of hours," she assured them.

Danny and Chloe were looking around, amazed. Danny was already poking around the consoles.

Tai looked at Billie. "Well?" he said with a strange expression of patient impatience.

She jumped when light suddenly flooded everything. They all watched in amazement as the entire Command Center began to ripple. Rubble disappeared, consoles came on, and there was the low sound of doors unlocking.

Danny pulled himself out from under the main console in the center of the room. "There. Everything should be working right. Whoa," he said, amazed by his own work.

"Get over yourself," Chloe told him.

Billy beamed. "Nicely done," he congratulated.

Danny nodded absently. "Right then, I believe we're all waiting for Billie the results of her analyses of that monster thing, right?" he asked without missing a beat.

"I have to write an anti-virus program. It needs to be plugged directly into the monster but it should free all those infected people. Then he's fair game," she answered.

"How long will that take?" Rex asked her.

"The rest of the night," she answered.

Nathan sighed. "I'll get the caffeine," he volunteered.

"We have to get back, but we'll keep you in supply," Winter assured them. Autumn nodded.

"What about that Skeleton Ranger?" Jason asked from where he seemed to have been watching them. He wasn't alone.

"They always have to go messing with evil Rangers," Tommy declared, shaking his head.

Autumn and Winter goggled at him then shared a brief look. "Dr. O," they greeted. He smiled at them and gave a little salute.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest. "He looks like he'll be tough, but he also seems to be having glitches," he answered Jason's question.

"Just watch your backs," Jason said.

"We'll let you know as soon as we have another bead on Virustron," Billy assured them.

"There's no way I'm leavin' this place," Danny declared.

Chloe rolled her eyes. "Yes you are. Mom wants to take us out tonight," she said and grabbed his ear. She gave the others a sweet smile and she and her brother teleported.

Autumn giggled. "Beep us if you need anything," she told Billie and Nathan. Winter gave a brief wave and they teleported away as well.

"Same goes for me," Tai said and after bumping fists with Rex, he teleported as well. Rex gave the elders a little salute before teleporting, too.

Billie cracked her knuckles. She worked a few controls and her laptop appeared. She plugged into the Command Center mainframe and got to work.

Nathan shook his head. "I'd better let his parents know he's staying over with me tonight and get Billie some caffeine," he said and gave a steady look. "You don't want to see her lacking caffeine," he declared and teleported as well.

Wood slept on clueless on the medi-bed.

Tommy glanced at Jason and raised an eyebrow. "New recruits looking good so far," he said.

Jason shook his head. "You ever going to retire?" he asked his asked his old friend.

Tommy just grinned. "Are you?"

-x-

Zita left her brother watching Virustron v.2. She had every intention of going to punish her Skeleton for retreating, but her chest was beginning to hurt. Instead she stumbled into her room. The pain was beginning to radiate into her head. This was different than the infamous Repulsa headaches she was prone to.

She stumbled into her bedroom and barely managed to stretch out on her bed, before the darkness wanting to cloud her vision overtook her completely.

-x-

Sora van Zandt awoke in a strange place and realized it was full night. His head throbbed and he couldn't remember how he got there. Shaking his head to clear it, he began making his way back to his apartment. He debated whether or not to tell his sensei about this, but decided to decide after he got some sleep.

-x-

Billie jumped up from where she'd fallen asleep on her computer at the loud crash suddenly echoing around the Command Center.



Nathan snickered. "Ah, the true face of Wilhelmina Davis. Keyboard imprinted onto it," he remarked dryly as he picked up the pizza box he'd dropped. The Command Center was so cavernous, the sound it made had even startled him.

Billie scowled and rubbed her face. "What time is it?" she demanded tartly. She took the flash drive from her USB port and wrapped the cord it was connected to around her wrist.

"'Bout ten," Wood answered, opening the pizza up and stuffing his face. He gave her a grin around his food. He'd ended up staying the night and now felt better than he had in weeks.

Billie groaned. "I need caffeine," she said and closed her eyes, rubbing the gritty feeling out of them. When she opened them, Nathan was sitting a large coffee cup in front of her. "You're my hero, Nath," she said and popped the lid off and took a grateful drink.

Luckily she didn't notice him flush slightly. "I just know you," he said and took a slice of pizza for himself.

Danny and Chloe appeared. He was bright eyed and bushy tailed while she looked half asleep. She perked up slightly when she smelled pizza.

Danny rubbed his hands together. "There's still lots of work to do on this place," he said.

Billie yawned. "Make a list, we'll work on it after we get rid of that viral monster," she said. He wasn't listening to her and was already pulling a PDA from his pocket and was making notes to himself.

Autumn and Winter appeared. Autumn had donuts and Win had a tray of coffee. He chuckled. "Looks like we were too late for refreshments," he declared.

Autumn made noise. "Pfft. I have donuts," she declared and set them down. Nathan dropped his half eaten slice of pizza and dashed for the doughnuts, taking a chocolate covered one with sprinkles.

Tai and Rex showed up. "No one thought to invite us to the party?" Rex asked. He spotted the donuts and the pizza at the same time. He wavered a moment before deciding on the pizza.

Tai shook his head at his friend with a slight smile. "How is it coming, Glitch?" he asked her.

Billie held up her wrist with the dangling flash drive. "Just have to insert this," she answered and yawned.

Billy skidded into the Command Center and looked around owlshly. "You're all here," he said. He was very reminiscent of Billie just then.

"Dr. Bill, you seriously need to sleep somewhere other than your ship," Billie told him.

Billy smiled sheepishly. Before he could ask her how she knew he slept on his ship, the viewer lit up. "It's Virustron. We finally located him," he said seriously.

Tai nodded. "Right. Let's take care of him and hope that Skeleton guy doesn't show up again," he stated

grimly. He twisted his wrists and made his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time. Tyrannosaurus!"

"Mastodon!"

"Triceratops!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Stygimoloch!"

-x-

Virustron v.2 found a strip mall downtown was a very good place to add to his horde of infected.

"Mistress Zita and Master Roki shall be pleased with all those under their control all ready," he said to himself in a sing song fashion.

"I don't think so," Red Ranger said stepping toward him.

Virustron found himself surrounded by Power Rangers, but he didn't seem to care. "Didn't you people learn last time? Go my slaves! Protect me!" he ordered the people mindlessly following them.

"Defend and detain. Wood, put those jumping legs to good use," he instructed just as some big hairy guy rushed him. He used his sheathed sword to block and deflect and push back the people trying to get a piece of him.

The male Black Ranger summoned the Power Scythe and was able to detract the blade so that he could use it as a staff. he was trying to be careful about hurting people, but they were tenacious.

The femme Black Ranger suddenly found herself about to be taken down by a football player size guy with a neck bigger around than her waist. She braced herself and the guy barreled into her. She didn't move. The guy stumbled back, groaning like he'd just hit a brick wall. "Now that was weird," she said with a gasp. "Power Axe!" she called, making the Power Axe appear. She mainly used the handle and flat of the blade to defend herself.

The male Blue Ranger was practicing what all he could do with his force-fields. Every now and then someone would slip through and he was forced to use the Power Lance.

The Green Rangers stood back to back, swapping the Dragon Staff back and forth, defending each other from the zombies. "Sorry!" the femme would say every once in awhile. The male would wince in sympathy and mutter, "My bad," every now and again.

The femme Blue unwrapped the flash drive from her wrist and tossed it at the Yellow Ranger. "Nathan. Up, distract him," she ordered.

The Pink Ranger summoned the Power Bo and levitated. He began firing on Virustron v.2 who was

blocking the arrows with his lance-blade. He didn't have time to notice the Yellow Ranger bouncing around, slipping through people's legs, and going over their heads. He got behind Virustron v.2. He opened up the flash drive and ran, springing forward like a big cat.

Virustron yelped. "Gerroff!" He tried to shake the Ranger off his back. He reached around to grab him, just as the flash drive was connected to a port in his chest. He threw the Yellow Ranger but the male Blue Ranger was there to catch him with a forcefield.

Every single person started in mid-action. Virustron scrambled to remove the flash drive, but it was too late. The people shuddered and fell to the ground. "Nooo! My slaves!" Virustron spat. "You'll all pay for that!" he said and waved his blade, throwing off some sort of energy wave that caught them all and sent them flying.

"Enough of this playing around. Power Blasters!" Red Ranger shouted and drew his. Nine Power Blasters were fired at once from all sides. Virustron v.2 screamed, sparked and exploded. The female Blue Ranger ran forward and continued blasting the laptop until there was nothing left of it but melted plastic and warped metal. And little of that.

She huffed and puffed. "That's one prize I'll pass on," she declared savagely and holstered her Power Blaster.

"Remind me not to get on her bad side," the male Black Ranger declared.

The femme Black Ranger shook her head. "I've never seen her good side," she stated.

The Red Ranger snorted. "Come on. Let's get back to the CC," he said and they all teleported.

-x-

Roki grunted and spun the spyglass away from him with a jerk. "Finster!" he shouted and stalked to the clay lab. "Have you made any progress with the growth serum?" he demanded.

Finster shook his head. "I'm sorry, master," he said and cringed slightly. "I'm working on it as fast as I can," he said.

Roki scoffed. "Work faster," he ordered and left the lab. Where the hell was his sister? Frowning he made his way to the bedroom wing and tapped on her door.

"GO AWAY!"

He turned on his heel and marched to his room. There was no dealing with her when she was in a mood. "Women," he said with a snort and slammed his door as hard as he could. He smiled when he heard a roar in response.

-x-

Tai watched his team quietly. He shifted slightly at the thought of 'his' team. They were coming together

well but there were still three halves of the coins as yet unclaimed. They just won a battle and were still a bit high on that, so he decided not to address the issue just then. Especially since he was one of the ones who needed to pick a partner.

He nearly jumped out of skin when Jason clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Thinking leadery thoughts, rookie?" he asked with a grin.

Tai looked down at the older man with a sheepish smile. "I guess you could say that. Though really I'm just wondering how the hell I'm supposed to pick a partner," he stated.

Jason smiled. "That's the easy part. You feel it here," he smacked Tai in the gut, "and you know," he answered then gave the boy a push. "Go join the group. Aloof leaders are overrated," he advised.

Tai nodded and approached the group working on the cold pizza and donuts. He snagged a jelly filled donut and answered a question Chloe asked with minimal words that had Rex laughing at him for his lack of prowess with words around cute girls. He then stood through some good natured ribbing from the Bakers and that was fine with him. This was his team now.

x-End Chapter Two-x

### 3 - Bring 'Em Together

Seeing as how it was still summer break, it was very strange to see most of the Youth Center's teenage customers before noon, even on a weekday, yet that was exactly what the Bakers were seeing. Autumn rubbed scratched a hand through her hair. "Is it just my imagination or is it unusually full right now?" she asked Winter and checked her watch.

Winter snickered. "I think it has a bit to do with that yoga group that was displaced and asked us to be able to use the Center until they can find another class," he explained. "Or haven't you noticed a good portion of our clientele today is male?" he pointed out.

Autumn gave him a hang-jawed looked and shook her head. "One day I'm going to meet a nice guy who isn't disgusting," she declared and went to make up an espresso someone just ordered.

Winter chuckled. "Good luck with that. No such paragon exists," he told her. That bit of wisdom earned him a raspberry.

Rex pushed Tai through the doors of the YC. Tai was struggling. "Grandpa had plans for me today, I can't just go gallivanting off with you to gawk at bunch of girls," he complained.

"Not just a bunch of girls. Yoga girls," Rex said with a smile.

Tai grunted and pulled away from his friend and went to the counter and ordered himself a chai tea.

Autumn gave him and Rex disappointed looks. "You guys, too?" she asked.

Tai jerked a thumb at Rex who was unrepentant and gave Autumn one of his best smiles. She shook her head at them both but fixed Tai's tea.

Rex bumped Tai's arm and nodded as a line of girls began to come into the YC. Despite his high ideals and the hope that he was somehow a little above base male instincts, Tai looked. He was no better than Rex.

There wasn't an ugly one in the bunch; that included their own Chloe Kennedy, who joined the class with Tori when they heard it was moving to the Youth Center. She paused by them and crossed her arms over her chest. "I expected better of our fearless leader," she stated. "You, however, do not surprise me in the least," she informed Rex.

"What can I say? I enjoy the ladies," Rex said.

Tai rubbed his forehead. "I'm going to kill you," Tai growled under his breath at Rex. He lost his voice completely when the last three members of the group came in. Manny Diaz was a slim Latina with sharp cheekbones, a wide smile and long dark brown hair. Holly Fairweather was a cute girl with straight hair dyed a deep red and always had an expression that seemed faraway. The last member of the group was

Lokelani Lyong with a slim, trim body, sun kissed skin, straight dark hair that flattered her mix of Hawaiian and Korean features.

Chloe and Tori glanced to see what had stolen Tai's tongue, not that he was ever exactly eloquent to start with. Tori giggled and Chloe shook her head. "The Fab Trio of thee junior class. Rex might stand half a chance, but sorry, Tai," she said and patted his arm sympathetically and went to join the class.

Tori gave him a sympathetic look. "Don't listen to her, Tai," she said gave him an encouraging smile before bouncing off to join Chloe.

Tai groaned and put his head down on the counter and wrapped an arm around it. "Am I so pathetic that Tori Williams feels the need to pep me up?" he demanded miserably.

Rex chuckled. "Right now, you look quite pathetic," he said helpfully.

Tai lifted his head to give his friend a glare. The threesome walked passed them just then and gave them waves. Rex waved back and Tai went blank.

Winter clucked his tongue sympathetically. "Here, Tai. Have another chai tea, on the house," he said, pushing forward another cup. His act of kindness earned him a glare as well, but he chose to ignore it and continued smiling.

Rex looked around. "Where'd Autumn go?" he asked.

Winter looked around. "Upstairs. We have a guest," he answered. He got perplexed expressions a moment before class started and his teenaged teammates forgot to ask any more questions.

-x-

In the Command Center, Billie and Danny stood before a door that was still locked. "What do you think is back here?" Danny asked her.

Billie shook her head. "I asked Dr. Bill and he didn't know. He said Alpha 5 just used these rooms for storage. Think you can get into it?" she asked him.

Danny just smirked. He pulled a screwdriver from his pocket and went to a console by the door and removed the face. From another pocket he pulled a pair of wire cutters. He hesitated. "You cut the power for the door, right?" he asked her.

"No. I'm waiting for you to electrocute yourself," she stated with a dead pan expression.

Danny shook his head. "Bloodthirsty," he muttered and began to cut and strip wires before rerouting things. "A'ight. That should do it," he said. Billie contacted Billy and had him turn the power back on to this section.

There was a whirring sound and the sound of an air release and the door's lock disengaged. Danny pushed at the door until it opened enough for their fingers to get through. The two of them muscled the

door open and peered in. It was pitch dark.

"Guess we should have brought a flash light," Billie complained. Danny nodded.

They discovered the door was actually another corridor. They walked down away and were suddenly standing in a semi-circular room with half finished projects and various other things. Danny felt along the wall until he found a power switch.

"Holy hell," Danny declared. Billie nodded dumbly as they both stared through a circular glass tube.

They both jumped back when there was a bright flash of light and the sound of something mechanical powering up. The glass of the tube began to lift. Danny and Billie scrambled back but something was following them.

-x-

Roki stretched out in his throne studying a vial of putrid green liquid in a vial. He had been informed by Finster that it was the growth serum. It had been added to the clay and the very next monster would have to ability to grow larger if subjected to an especially large blast of power.

Naturally, Roki had ordered a monster to be to test it.

He glanced up when his sister entered the throne room. "So you're still alive," he remarked.

Zita looked like hell. "No thanks to you," she said and sat down with a huff.

"I tried to check on you. If I had put a finger in your room I fear I may have lost it. What was wrong with you anyway?" he demanded.

Zita shook her head. "I...don't know. I feel better than I have in ages, however. I see you're plotting. Anything interesting?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Testing Finster's growth serum. Why don't you run a test of your own until he had the monster ready," he suggested.

Zita rubbed her chin and smirked. "A brilliant idea," she declared.

-x-

Danny and Billie gaped as the robot that was walking toward them suddenly powered down and drooped. "Oh. I think she needs juice," Billie said quietly.

Danny nodded. Both of them were still amazed at what they were looking at. It was vaguely girl-shaped android with silver skin, large white eyes and white metal shaping hair and clothes. "This place is so awesome," he declared. As one they sprang into action, looking for something in what was obviously someone's lab that would charge the robot girl.

Danny unearthed some cables and a black box. He couldn't see what was in the box, but judging by its weight and various toggles and plugs, he theorized it looked enough like a car battery to assume it was a power source. He figured out how to hook the robot to it and turned it on.

Billie took the opportunity to run for her laptop bag. With a brief explanation to Billy, she ran back. While the robot was charging he found a way to access her programming. "Ugh, parallel ports? How nineties," she complained and fished around in her bag and pulled out the appropriate cables and linked up, then she began delving into the programming.

"Hmm. There are two different sets of programming going on in here," she mused thoughtfully.

"Whazzat mean?" Danny asked as he checked her over for damage.

Billie shook her head. "Not sure. It looks like...there's original programming and something uploaded later," she mumbled. "I think I can integrate them," she said and began typing furiously on her laptop. Danny just nodded and let her do her thing.

-x-

Autumn came back into the Youth Center about an hour later followed by a slim Asian girl with medium length dark hair. She looked tired, with shadows beneath dark eyes. She gave Win a wary look and stayed behind Autumn for a moment. She didn't really have anything against him, but suddenly appearing behind her the night before had scared the bejeezes out of her. Luckily, Autumn seemed to know how to diffuse the situation.

She was really grateful to them both. Just by their appearance, the shadowy figures that had seemed to beset upon her as soon as she came to Earth had scared her to the very marrow of her bones. Yet Autumn and Win had been unable to see them and the appearance of them had made the figures fade away to nothing.

She couldn't remember much, just a name and waking up staring down at a girl who had looked just like her. She'd known, instinctively, that she had to get far away from the girl. She was also trying to find someone. She could not remember who or why but she knew it was of the utmost importance.

Autumn smiled faintly. "Sorry I disappeared on you, Winter. I was checking on Rei, and then I ducked out to buy her a few things," she explained. She peered around. "Wow, this place emptied out quick," she commented.

Winter chuckled. "Yoga class ended. How are you feeling, Rei?" he asked her with a kind smile.

Rei gave a tired smile. "Much better and I'm ready to begin job training," she added with a grin and gave a little salute.

"And, here I thought that was my job," a new voice cut in. All three of them turned to see a fit black man in late twenties. His hair was short and neat. He wore jeans and a black polo shirt.

"Zack Taylor," Win said. In the all the excitement the night before and that morning, he nearly forgot that



the man was coming. He came around the counter and introduced himself, his sister and Rei.

-x-

Sora van Zandt was on his way to the Youth Center. It seemed like a fun place, plus he had seen places where he could train and spar. He had to keep in shape, especially if there was any hope of concluding his mission. He had not had the opportunity to make contact with the Power Rangers yet he's heard all about them already.

He was musing that one over as he entered the park. His sensei would be displeased with him. Sensei was an easy going man most of the time, but those rare times that he got short tempered were downright scary.

The thing to do was find the place his cousin had told him about, but she had admitted to not knowing exactly how to get there. She knew it was located outside the city in the desert. He wasn't about to go wandering around the desert on her word. Especially not after that map she had drawn him.

So, the next step would possibly be to make contact with them next time they were out defending the city from the featureless Z-men he was told were called Putties. "Just have to find some Putties, boyo," he said to himself.

"Did you say something?" Lani Lyong had separated from her friends after the yoga session. Manny had gone off with Tori Williams to discuss cheerleading things they were planning for when school started next week. Holly had gone to help her father with some special project she wasn't supposed to talk about. That suited Lani fine since it would just go over her head anyway.

She'd decided to get something from one of her favorite hot dog vendors in the park and nearly collided with the intent young man who appeared to be talking to himself. She wasn't in the best of moods either. Somehow or other Tai Stapleton managed to slip out of the Youth Center when she wasn't looking. Maybe it was for the best. She wouldn't have had the nerve to talk to him without her friends around anyway.

Sora blinked at the girl. "Er, sorry, luv. I was just talkin' to m'self," he said sheepishly.

Lani nodded blankly. "Um...please tell me those are friends of yours and not what I think they are," she said and pointed.

Sora turned around slowly. Watching them with oddly curious interest were about twenty Z Putties. "Funny thing. I'm hopin' they're your mates," he said quietly even as he took up a defensive posture.

Lani cracked her knuckles. "Nope," she said. She reached out and touched the Z on one of their chests. When he dissolved, the others reacted and began to attack. Lani Lyong hadn't been raised by a martial arts fanatical father and survived three older brothers without learning a thing or two.

Sora didn't truly have time to be impressed by the girl because the pain in his head beginning to pound behind his eyes. He was doing a relatively good job of defending himself while holding it back, but he was terrified of the darkness. He didn't know what happened in the darkness.

-X-

Billy was working in the main room of the Command Center while the junior Blues were playing with the toy they found. The viewer came on. He contacted everyone that there were Z Putties in the park. Billie and Danny came into the main room. "Danny. Get me a sample of that clay. It's time we updated things in here," Billie declared sourly and teleported.

Danny didn't bother to argue and teleported as well. The robot needed more charging so he wasn't too worried about leaving it unattended.

-X-

Power Rangers appeared in the park. Sora was so relieved he nearly lost it and a Putty knocked him for a loop. The Pink Ranger ran over to him. "Dude. You need get out of here," he said seriously and helped him to his feet.

"No. I...have to speak to the Power Rangers," Sora said as the darkness encroached.

"Well, you're going to have to wait. We're in the middle of a Putty problem," Pink Ranger pointed out. "And you don't look so good. Do you know where the Youth Center is?" he asked.

Sora managed a nod. "Go wait there and someone will find you," Pink Ranger instructed. Sora thought that was a very good idea and decided to leave the park while the Rangers were giving him cover. He didn't make it far before the darkness caught him.

The Red Ranger went to help Lani who seemed to be surrounded. Yet, when he arrived, he realized she was handling herself very well. Jason had said he would feel it in his gut when he found his partner. Admittedly there were probably some lower feelings too but right then he knew. "Lokelani Lyong," he said as the coin shard appeared in his hand.

Lani kicked at a Z Putty and watched him disappear before turning to the extremely tall Red Ranger. Her eyes widened a bit. "Yes?" she asked dumbly.

He held out a hand and she took it without hesitation. "Tyrannosaurus," he stated seriously.

"Tyrannosaurus?" she asked. She briefly felt the coin shard before red energy formed her cuffs and spread over her, forming a female version of the red power suit.

"Welcome to the team," he said and quickly let go of her hand.

Clapping startled them. They turned to see the Skeleton Ranger walking toward them. "How touching," he said. He drew his massive sword.

"Handle the Putties. I'll see what I can do about this guy," the male Red ranger told his new partner.

Though psyched about this turn of events, the femme Red nodded and did as she was instructed. "Good

luck!" she said and dove into the fray.

The Pink Ranger approached her. "Sticks. Welcome to the team," he said good-naturedly.

The femme Red Ranger faltered slightly. "Nathan?" she demanded. His only response was a chuckle as he took out a few Putties.

The Skeleton Ranger didn't seem overly intimidated by the male Red Ranger drawing his katana. He snorted. "Are you serious?" he demanded derisively.

The Red Ranger looked at his sword then at Skeleton's. "At least I don't have compensation issues," he stated. He summoned a burst of strength and rushed forward.

The Skeleton Ranger swung forward. The blades clashed in the air. The impact jarred them both, sending a numbing vibration through both their arms. They stumbled back. The Skeleton Ranger shook his head. Something was lingering there. A thought. A realization that the Red Ranger wouldn't be able to withstand another attack. He should attack now. No. He couldn't. Yes, he could!

The male Red Ranger watched the Skeleton Ranger stagger around. He was grateful because he knew that he didn't have another burst of strength in him.

"This...this isn't over," the Skeleton Ranger snarled as he wrestled with himself mentally. He teleported away.

"Didn't he say that last time?" the male Black Ranger mused.

The male Red Ranger sheathed his sword and realized the Putties were gone as well. "Yeah. That just means he'll be back," he stated. "Regroup at the Command Center," he called out. He looked at his new partner. "Follow me," he said and teleported. She teleported after him feeling giddy and overwhelmed. The other Rangers teleported as well.

-x-

Zita snorted in disgust. "I really don't understand how he keeps shaking the curse. It was powerful enough to control any human mind," she declared sourly and stalked back to her throne and sat with a pout. She crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot as she set her mind to figuring out how to control him better.

Roki shook his head. "Looks like the exoskeleton is holding up well. Finster! Have you completed my monster yet?" he demanded.

"Trojojo is here! I was completed minutes ago therefore I exist. I walked into the throne room so I am here," a deep voice stated as a horse headed monster dressed like an ancient warrior came into the throne room.

Roki rubbed his forehead. "Go. Attack Angel Gove," he ordered. Trojojo bowed and disappeared from the moon.

"Finster's been watching Powerpuff Girls too much. I think we need to take his television away," Zita said.

Roki covered his face with one hand and shook his head.

-x-

Lani looked around in awe at the Command Center then she watched everyone demorph. As she thought, the Pink Ranger turned into Nathan Doyle. Wood Johnson as the Yellow Ranger wasn't too surprising either. Rex Hart and Chloe Kennedy weren't eyebrow rising. Danny Kennedy she wasn't shocked by. Billie Davis, however, was a little unexpected.

The Red ranger's height probably should have given Tai away, but it had not even registered, not until he drew his sword. There was no mistaking that sword and the craftsmanship of Akira Watanabe. Her father had an original Japanese striking of an Akira Watanabe sword but not even her eldest brother Pua was allowed to touch it.

"I really hope you're staring at his sword, otherwise it's getting kind of creepy," Chloe broke into her thoughts, making her jump and flush.

"I, er..."

"We'll say she was staring at his sword. Sticks is a weapons junky," Nathan said. Tai cleared his throat and drummed his fingers over his sheath nervously. Rex hid a snicker behind a cough.

Wood grinned. "Welcome to the Command Center. Do you know everybody?" he asked her.

Lani nodded. "I'm familiar with everyone," she answered. Even if she wasn't the drummer of Nathan's band and therefore Wood, Billie and Danny sometimes showed up for gigs, they were also in the same class. The martial arts community wasn't very large either and she'd even seen Chloe compete before. She was also known to watch kendo matches. There wasn't a person at Angel High who didn't know who Rex Hart was.

"Yeah, yeah. Welcome to the team and all that. Billie, the robot," Danny said. Billie nodded and the Blue team darted off.

"You'll get used to that," Nathan said with a grin. "Formal introductions are in order I think," he said and rubbed his hands together. "Tai, you're new partner Lani Lyong. Lani, this is Tai Stapleton. You kids make nice while I go see what has Billie and Danny in such a tizzy," he added.

"Me, too," Wood said and the two of them walked off.

Tai dipped his head and cleared his throat again. "Sorry to spring that on you," he mumbled.

Lani smiled. "No. No reason to apologize," she assured him. She glanced at his sword again. "Can I see it?" she asked in a small voice.

Tai couldn't help the smile that crept over his face as he handed her the sword.

Lani nearly squealed as she got her hands on it and unsheathed it with awe. It was finely wrought and well balanced. "Beautiful. Papa has one, but we aren't allowed to touch it. It's an original Japanese casting and he paid an arm and leg for it," she said and winced at her own babbling.

Tai nodded. "He would, considering an original Japanese casting would be over forty years old," he remarked. Oh sure, he makes sense when talking about Grandpa's swords. He shot them a glare when Chloe and Rex began making snoring noises. Lani flushed again and handed his sword back to him.

"Stop ragging on the leaders," Autumn scolded them. For good measure Winter popped Rex on the back of the head. Rex rubbed his head but he and Chloe snickered.

The viewer came on and Winter looked at it. "Looks like a monster in an industrial complex downtown," he said.

Nath had come back, remembering the guy at the park and the promise to find him at the Youth Center when Win made that proclamation. He grimaced. "Dang. Guy'll have to wait," he muttered.

Tai nodded. He contacted the other three and they came running. "It's Morphin' time!"

"Tyrannosaurus!"

"Mastodon!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Triceratops!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Dragonzord!"

-x-

Trojojo raised his sword aloft. "Charge! That is to say get them, meaning to attack!" he ordered the Putties he brought with them. Construction workers and people in suits began to panic and scramble around. "This is fun. Meaning I am enjoying myself," he declared to himself.

"Then it's time to ruin your day," the femme Red Ranger declared. The male Red Ranger appeared behind her and drew his sword.

The other Rangers appeared as well. Putties rushed forward to attack.

The femme Blue Ranger activated her helmet computer. "Got ya back, Glitch," the Male Blue assured her. "Power Lance!" The Power Lance appeared and he began taking out Putties as they surrounded

them.

"Dragon Staff!" the femme Green Ranger made her weapon appear while her brother was enjoying Putties barreling through him only to resolidify and take them out. "Show off," she told him and thrust her staff at the Z of a Putty.

"Don't be jealous just because all you can do is see lights other people can't," he teased and whipped around, kicking another Putty in the Z.

"Power Scythe!"

"Power Axe!"

The Black Rangers stood back to back and took out Putties as they came upon them "Did I ever thank you for this?" the femme asked.

"I'll have to think of an appropriate way for you express your gratitude," the male Black Ranger answered and hacked his blade through a Putty that got a little too close.

"In your dreams!" she declared and axed another Putty.

"Every night," he agreed and poked a Putty in the Z with the end of his Scythe.

"Power Daggers!"

"Power Bow!"

The Yellow Ranger began jumping around taking down Putties. "Man, I think I'm jealous," he complained good-naturedly.

The Pink Ranger let loose an arrow, "Don't worry, Wood, I dream about you," he said cheerily.

The Yellow Ranger snorted. "I meant the having a partner bit," he declared and slashed a Putty in the Z.

"Does that mean I can't dream about you anymore?" He didn't wait for a response, floating up into the air and taking down another putty.

Trojojojo attacked the Red Rangers. He swung his sword. The male Red rushed forward to block it.

"Power Sword!" the femme Red ranger summoned a double bladed sword and it was a work of sheer beauty. She and her partner gaped at it a moment. Taking advantage of his inattention, Trojojojo tried to take off the male Red's head.

The femme Red reacted and bent her entire body in the most awkward angle that shouldn't have exactly been possible in order to block the blow. "I owe you," the male Red said. She nodded and the two of them engaged in a dance of blades.

The femme Blue clapped her hands together. "You guys! We have all the weapons to form the Power Blaster! Power Sword! Power Bow! Power Lance! Power Axe! Power Daggers!" she told them.

As each weapon was called, its wielder grouped together and added their weapon to the mix. Once the weapon was formed, the five of them aimed. "Power Blaster! Fire!" the femme Black Ranger pulled the trigger and an energy blast powered toward Trojojojo.

"Oh no! As in, oh no! Meaning oh no!" he said as the energy hit him. He sparked and exploded.

He stayed exploded.

-x-

Billy went to check on the robot the Blue team had found. The robot straightened suddenly, causing him to jump back in surprise. Her eyes began glowing. Her two programs, personalities really, had merged and now she was juiced up. "Ay yi yi! Father, what have you done?" she said in a voice that was distinctly feminine, yet distorted and damaged. "Accessing all damage," she said and her lids lowered, the only moveable metal on her face.

Billy merely watched in fascination.

"Damage report complete. Minor repairs needed," she announced. She blinked and looked at him. "Billy!" she exclaimed and began to detach herself from all the wires and cables she was connected to.

Billy managed a small smile. "I don't believe we've met. Do you mind giving me a report on who you are and when you were made?" he asked her with a puzzled frown.

The robot blinked again. "I am Beta Z though my father would sometimes call me Beez. I was first created as a fully functional A.I. core unit one decade ago. Over the course of several years, Father built me various shells in which to house my core, finally deciding on this one. Then, something bad happened, but I detect memory erasures in various spots of my memory chips. I have many of Father's memories now but I cannot find how or when I received them," her voice became more garbled the more she used it until it sounded like she was talking through a walkie talkie, a very cheap one.

Billy nodded. "Well, perhaps I can repair your voice and then we'll get to the bottom of all the mysteries," he said as he fished around in Danny's tools.

"Thank you Bil--," her voice trailed off into a garbled electronic mess.

Billy nodded and repaired her voice box. "Well, Beez. We have a lot to talk about," he said.

"Yes, Billy," she agreed and her eyes glowed warmly.

-x-

Roki growled. "Finster!" he roared. "Your growth serum didn't work!" he shouted.

"Please brother, you give me a headache," Zita said with a sigh.

He slumped in his throne and they both brooded over their losses.

-x-

Tai, Lani and Nathan walked into the Youth Center from the front while Autumn and Winter filed in from the back to pretend they'd only been on a break, relieving Zack and Rei, who have been having crash training from Nanna Mai.

Tai looked around. "Do you see him?" he asked Nathan.

Nathan looked around and Lani, too, since she knew what the guy looked like. "I don't see him. He seemed adamant about talking to the Power Rangers," Nathan explained.

Tai sighed. "You told Autumn and Win what he looked like--"

"And that he has an accent," Lani interrupted.

Tai nodded. "They'll let us know if he comes in. In the meantime, I have to ask Grandpa how come the Power Sword has a Watanabe dragon on it," he said. He nodded to them and left the Youth Center.

Nathan shook his head. "Is Tai's Grandpa really all that in the weapons world?" he asked Lani.

She nodded. "He is," she stated. "Come one emo-boy, let's get a milkshake," she said and they went to the counter. The end of the battle deserved a little celebration.

x-The End Chapter Three-x



## 4 - Something Wicked .1

Billie tromped into the Youth Center after school and sat down at the booth/table that was quickly becoming property of her, Nathan, Danny and Wood. She lay her head down on her book bag. She was utterly exhausted. She had spent the remainder of last week and all weekend with Danny and Billy overhauling the command center and repairing Beta Z and integrating her into the Command Center's central computer. They had encoded their DNA into the system so that trespassers couldn't infiltrate without setting off alarms that would alert anyone with a communicator.

Beta Z, or Beez as she preferred to be called, was wonderment of scientific masterwork. Her learning and adaptive abilities had Danny in a constant state of awe. Billie had to admit this Alpha 5 was pretty damn awesome when it came to programming. She would be impressed with the mid-nineties work, but Billy had explained to them that Alpha 5 had been an android built on the far more technologically advanced planet Eltar.

Still, all things considered, she was awesome. Almost absently she pulled out a notebook and began to doodle some ideas she'd been having but had to be put on the back burner until they finished upgrading the Command Center.

Nathan, Danny and Wood came in. Nathan and Danny joined her while Wood continued to the counter. Danny wasn't in any better shape than Billie but he had the presence of mind to scope out what she was working on. He didn't say a word and fished out a notebook of his own and opened up a page he'd been scribbling on all day. He plopped it in front of her face.

Billie took it in and nodded.

Nathan watched in fascination as they immediately got on the same page and began speaking in some sort of alien techno language he didn't understand in the least.

Wood came back with smoothies for him and Nathan and Billie-specials for Billie and Danny. "Scary when they do that, isn't it?" he said to Nathan.

Nathan nodded. "Creepy even," he said and took his smoothie.

Behind the counter Rei was quickly adapting to working the Youth Center. Autumn had gone to take a delivery to the Scott Dojo and she was manning the fort in her place. She still had Winter as back up though. Every now and then, however, she caught herself looking for someone. Which was silly since she didn't remember knowing anyone, so who would she be looking for? She tsk'd herself and smiled as Chloe and Tori stepped up to the counter.

Chloe ordered two strawberry shakes and an order of fries. "Where do you feel like sitting?" she asked her friend, who seemed to be spacing out a tad.

Tori wasn't spacing out, she was staring at the three people who came into the Youth Center. One was a

tall, elegant black woman of the Grace Jones mold with cute Bantu knots softening her look a bit. She was in her late twenties and dressed very fashionably. Maybe a little too much so. With her was a younger man in his early twenties with pretty green eyes and faintly curly brown hair. The third person was a redheaded woman around the same age as the young man with warm blue eyes.

Chloe shook her friend's shoulder. "Ey, you wit' me?" she asked and peered at the trio curiously.

Tori turned her attention to Chloe and smiled faintly. "Sorry. Let's go sit over there and harass your brother," she suggested and nodded toward the booth next to the foursome.

Chloe smirked. "My favorite pastime. But you just want to get close to Wood," she pointed out wickedly.

Tori flushed. "Don't be silly," she muttered. "Meet you over, I gotta run and pee right quick," she said and bounced off. She turned briefly as she neared the restroom entrance and signaled the black woman covertly.

Chloe shrugged. Her friend hadn't been herself lately, but as open and cheerful as Tori Williams was, if there was something she didn't want to talk about, she wouldn't. She paid Rei and took the shakes and fries and went to sit at the table. She checked out the green eyed guy as his female companions went off toward the bathroom. She had to admit, he was pretty cute. He noticed her looking and gave her a wide smile. She returned it with a blush and turned her attention to her fries. She was as bad as Tori.

Just so she wasn't obvious she turned and sat on her knees to peer over the divider of the booths to see what was happening over there.

-x-

Autumn breezed into the Scott Dojo as if she belonged there. There was a lot of activity usually, but it was currently the lull between day classes and the 4 o'clock after school classes. She went to the back and gave a perfunctory knock on the office door and walked in. She glanced around. "Where's big brother?" she asked with a grin.

The young woman behind a desk doing paperwork looked up with a grin. She was a cutely athletic woman with hair that was blond over brown and warm brown eyes. "He said something about meeting some old friends of his and left me to handle the afternoon classes. That," she said and pointed to the bag Autumn carried, "is on him," she said with a grin.

Autumn chuckled and set the bag on the desk. She and Randi Scott went back a ways. Winter and Randi's twin brother were best friends through middle school and high school, therefore Autumn was exposed to them a lot. Though she was several years older, she and Autumn got on well. "I'll add it to his tab," she assured her. "Where is that rascalion A.J.?" she asked.

Randi shook her head. "Doing his motocross thing. You know A.J. He's a free spirit," she said rolling her eyes. "Last time I talked to him, he did mention coming to visit soon and bringing a friend," she said.

Autumn nodded. "I'll let Win know if he doesn't already. Do you mind if I sit. I'm going to make this trip last awhile," she said.

Randi chuckled. "Sit," she invited and Autumn did just that.

-x-

Tori paced the bathroom until the older women came in. She pointed a finger at them. "Does Taran know about this little stunt?" she demanded as if they were the sixteen-year-olds and she the adult.

Ifeteyo Kotze was ten full years old than Tori and she found her rather cute just then. "He won't be thrilled but we weren't about to leave you alone during this time," she said in a dignified African accent.

"You can count on him showing up as well," Ros Jones stated in a black country British accent.

Tori rubbed her forehead. "How did you all even get into the country?" she asked them and narrowed her eyes slightly.

"Don't worry about that. Our papers are all in order. Have done for years," Ros assured her. "Casey is good like that," she assured the younger girl.

Tori sighed. "I sure hope so. I'll let DF know you guys are here. Where are you staying?" she asked suspiciously.

"Covered. I booked a suite at a nice hotel," Fey stated. A devious smile suddenly crossed her face. "So, who was the kid with the dreads were looking so hang dog at before we came in?" she asked.

"You keep your love voodoo away from me," Tori said and stalked out of the bathroom. She joined Chloe, though she was hanging over the back of the booth bickering with her brother. Tori sighed and took a long slurp of her shake.

-x-

Roki was working in a lab within the Palace. He got tired of Finster's excuses as to why the growth serum wasn't working. He wore a lab coat and goggles. "If I knew what Mother did with her staff, I wouldn't have these problems," he muttered. He wasn't without magical power, but sometimes magic wasn't the answer. Well, not completely anyway.

Zita strolled in and rolled her eyes. "Still trying to get the monsters to grow?" she asked.

"Yes," he said as he carefully a vial of something blue to a beaker full of something red. There was explosion that left his goggles coated with murky purple film and filled the room of putrid smelling smoke.

Zita coughed and waved her hand trying to clear some breathing room. "That is so foul, it'd better work," she declared between hacking.

Roki merely gave her manic grin. He dashed out of his lab into Finster's lab and added it to a block of clay. "Make me a monster. Now!" he ordered Finster.

Finster quickly turned off his television and bowed several times. "Yes, yes master," he said and began rummaging around for a suitable mold.

Zita rolled her eyes. "While you do that, I'm going try an experiment of my own," she said and disappeared in a wisp of purple smoke.

Roki, unaware she was even gone, gave an absent wave over his shoulder.

-X-

Kimberly Hart made her way down into the basement gym of her uncle Iain's home where two of her favorite cousins were training. She'd arrived in Angel Grove over the weekend, checked in with Billy and the robot Beta Z. She was now equipped with a communicator and access to the Command Center without setting off the alarm system the Blue team had installed.

She was crashing at her parents home while she began recruiting students. She was an award winning gymnast but now she was a private coach. She decided to come home to the nest, so to speak. She watched quietly as the fourteen year old Rena and the Rex engaged in a back flip competition.

She smiled slightly. Rex was good. If he'd been as single minded as their cousin Mason, he'd probably be an Olympic Gold medalist, too. Rena was better than Kim was at her age as well, but she was just as flighty about training as Rex. They did it for fun, not glory. Show-offs.

"Am I going to be ignored all day?" she finally asked.

"Just a minute, Kim. I almost got him beat," Rena said between flips. Rex snorted and proceeded to trounce his little sister thoroughly. When they were done, Rena pouted. "I hate him," she muttered then she beamed at Kim and gave her a hug.

Rex came up behind her and enveloped them both. Rena gasped something about not being to breathe and he stepped back with a grin. "Go get cleaned up, Rat. Kimmy and me have grown-up things to discuss," he told his sister.

Rena rolled her eyes. "Like you count," she stated and flounced up the stairs.

Kim giggled. "So, what grown-up things do we have to discuss, li'l Rexy?" she asked him.

Rex grinned. "Power Ranger things," he answered.

Kim sobered and nodded. "Guess that would count," she remarked. She gave him a cocky wink. "Welcome to the club," she declared.

-X-

A monster that looked like he wore a spacesuit and had a swollen worm's head appeared near the City Pound. Z Putties appeared around him. Wormster wasn't just an experiment with the growth serum, he also carried an overly large blaster weapon that sprayed worms on people and attached to them and

siphoned their memories.

He had a rather fondness for animals and was determined to set them all free of vile human control. People milling around screamed when the creatures appeared. "Free the puppies!" he ordered the Putties and began blasting humans.

-x-

Sora sat in his apartment nursing an arm that was still sore. He couldn't imagine what he had done to get it. He got up and moved to the faux mantle above a fake fireplace and toyed with the small sword replica he's had since he was young. His father had given it to him before he left, never to be heard from again.

He sighed. He hadn't gone to the Youth Center for several reasons. The first being that his classes were taking up a lot of his time. The main one, though, he had a sinking suspicion he knew what happens when the darkness gets him.

Some sixth sense alerted him to the fact that he was no longer alone. He turned and gasped as he took in the woman in the black and purple battle suit with blades coming out in various places. He recognized her. "We...met before," he said.

Zita strode forward and grabbed his coin. "You are my puppet and you will not break my control again!" she snarled and fed a burst of magical energy into him.

Sora cried out as pain wracked him. The blackness overcame him swiftly.

The Skeleton Ranger stood before his mistress. "He's getting annoying," he stated in a voice devoid of the charming accent.

Zita nodded. "I want you do go do as much damage as you possibly can to the city. If any Rangers get in your way, take no prisoners," she said and crossed her arms over her chest.

Skeleton Ranger bowed and teleported. Zita made a helmet appear over her head and she followed him.

-x-

Lani was at the mall with Manny and Holly when she got the call to meet at the Command Center. She was faced the perplexing dilemma of making excuses. "I'll be back soon, you guys. I forgot Mama wanted me to get something for her," she said apologetically, hating lying to her friends, but that was merely part of being a super hero.

"We'll tag along," Holly said with a smile.

"Thought you said you wouldn't be caught dead in Kana TuTu's," she said, naming a shop that catered to less than stylish middle aged women. Unfortunately, her mother really did shop there.

Manny and Holly grimaced. "Yeah, you go," Holly said. "We'll meet at the food court," she suggested.

Lani smiled and nodded and waved and darted away from them to find a private place to teleport.

She arrived last and blushed in embarrassment.

No one seemed to mind. Billy was manning the Command Center as usual, but it was Beta Z who called them. She brought up two different screens, one showing Wormster's attack and the other showing the Skeleton Ranger across town.

"Damn," Tai muttered. "Lani, take Billie, Danny, Chloe, Wood and Nathan to handle the monster. Autumn, Winter, Rex and I will try keep the Skeleton Ranger distracted until you guys can take care of the monster. Then hightail it over to help," he instructed.

Lani nodded. "Right," she agreed. She twisted her wrists making her cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Triceratops!"

"Mastodon!"

"Stygimoloch!"

"Tyrannosaurus!"

Once the Ranger had morphed and teleported, Beez looked at Billy. "He was well chosen," she declared thoughtfully.

Billy nodded with a smile. "Indeed he was," he agreed.

-x-

Animals were running around everywhere, people covered in worms slumped on the ground having their memories siphoned off. Putties were running amok.

Pandemonium awaited the Rangers. "You Rangers cannot stop me!" Wormster declared. Putties rushed forward to attack.

The femme Blue Ranger didn't have a chance to stay out of the fray as Putties attacked her, sensing she was the weakest link. She was, but that didn't mean she was going to let Putties get away with attacking her. "Power Sais!" she called and the two-foot long weapons appeared. She tossed one at an advancing Putty, hitting in square in the Z. When she went to jab another one, she lost her footing and went down. Or would have if the Pink Ranger hadn't caught her.

Over her head, the male Blue Ranger jabbed the Putty with the Power Lance. "We gotta work on your

fighting skills," he declared.

The Male Pink helped her find her footing. "Now that's a show I'd pay to see," he declared.

"Hey! A little less chit-chat and more fighting please," the femme Red Ranger said as she bent backwards at an incredibly awkward angle to avoid a blow from a Putty. The Yellow Ranger sprang over her to kick the Putty in the Z.

"But the chit chat is part of the fun," he said as he landed.

Wormster found himself devoid of Putties sooner than he would have thought. "Uh-oh. He who runs away, lives to run away another day!" he declared and disappeared.

The femme Black Ranger cocked her hip and put a fist on it. "Did that really just pull a runner?" she demanded, offended by the mere thought.

"No time to worry about it now. We have get to Tai and the others!" the femme Red said. They nodded and teleported.

-x-

The Skeleton Ranger was on a path of destruction, using his gigantic sword to wreck cars and flinging energy blasts from it to explode into buildings, shattering their windows. He felt unstoppable.

A shrill whistle rent the air, calling his attention. He turned and saw that the male Red and Black Rangers and the Green Rangers were surrounding them.

They were right outside the Youth Center and had a bit of an audience. Rei watched through the window's in pure shock.

Tori was being all but physically restrained by Fey and Ros while the young man, Hayden Bly was talking sense to her.

Zita jumped from her perch on a building across the street. Her helmet folded back, revealing her face with a streak of black lightning painted under one eye. "You Rangers know you can't hope to defeat my Skeleton Ranger," she declared.

The male Red Ranger pulled his sword with a metallic hiss. "That's yet to be seen," he declared.

Skeleton Ranger stepped forward. He swung his sword toward the Youth Center. The energy blast blew out the windows. "That will be you," he informed them.

"Our windows," the femme Green moaned quietly. "Power Staff!" she summoned the staff and jumped to swing.

"No!" Rei was suddenly there and from her came a blast of magical energy that knocked them all back, including the Skeleton Ranger.

Zita sucked in a hissing breath. "You!" she seethed. "Who are you?" she demanded.

Rei ignored her and ran to help the Skeleton Ranger, but he was already on his feet. He pushed her away with a growl and staggered off as the pain began splitting his head open. He teleported. Zita was shocked and angry. She roared and jumped at Rei but Rangers suddenly surrounded her. She disappeared in a puff of purple smoke.

Rei slipped away as well, running off determined to find this Skeleton Ranger for reasons she herself did not know.

The male Red looked around his other team mates. "Monster?"

"Pulled a runner," the femme Black grouched.

He nodded. "Lets get back," he said and the Rangers teleported to their prior activities.

-x-

Tori had sent Fey, Ros and Hayden back to their hotel after the Rangers disappeared. Ros wisely agreed and shooed the other two away. She was now helping to clean up broken glass along side Autumn, Winter, Nanna Mai and several other volunteers.

She carried a sack full of glass to the Dumpster behind the building.

One of the volunteers was Wood. He watched Tori go quietly. Man, he wished he could choose her to be his partner, but it just didn't feel right. He followed behind her quietly. "Hey," he greeted quietly.

Tori looked up and gave him a smaller smile that was about a thousand watts dimmer than her usual Tori smiles. Wood was quite an expert on many things Tori. She hadn't smiled that smile for few weeks now. "Hi, Wood," she greeted and hefted the bag up over her head, standing on her tiptoes.

Wood wasn't the tallest boy, but he was still taller than her, so he rushed forward to help her before she hurt herself. She gave him a smile that was a little brighter. "Thanks," she said with a light blush.

Wood stepped back with a nod. "Is everything all right?" he asked her. "Who were those people you were talking to before?" he asked.

Tori hid her surprise that he'd noticed her talking to Fey, Ros and Hayden. She didn't have a suitable answer to explain how she knew an African woman, an Englishwoman, or an Australian man. None of her cheerleading comps were international.

Wood smiled. "It's ok, you don't have to tell me," he assured her.

Strangely, tears pricked her eye but she blinked them back. Then she went and did something crazy. She hugged him because she needed a hug in a big way. Wood didn't mind. He was surprised, thrilled even, but he didn't mind in the least. He hugged her back.



She blushed and stepped away. "Sorry," she murmured and dashed back around the side of the building. She skidded to a halt when she saw a tall blond man coming up, eyeing the damage. "Taran!" she shouted and rushed forward to hug him.

Taran Goldsmith got an armful of Tori before he stop her. He smiled and patted her head in a brotherly fashion. "Nice to see you again, too," he said.

Wood watched the scene with a not so pleased expression. Autumn and Winter noticed this, too.

Tori beamed her thousand watt smile as she turned. "Ok, nosies," she scolded them lightly. "This is Taran Goldsmith. He's like a big brother to me," she announced.

Taran nodded his head. "Hello," he greeted. He gave them a rather bashful smile. His voice had a bit of a farm boy drawl.

Autumn found herself staring. The colors around him were amazing and she wasn't sure what they all meant. She blinked several times to clear her vision.

"So...if he's like a brother to you, how come we've never seen him before?" Winter asked, a tad suspicious.

Tori rebuffed his concern with a wave of her hand. "We met during one of my junior high cheer comps in Kansas. He was working to earn extra money. We're both adopted and we kind of hit it off and stayed in contact," she explained. It was a sort of true story. They had met when she was in junior high. Even Chloe knew the story she spun about Taran.

Winter nodded slightly. "Well, welcome to Angel Grove. I'm Winter Baker and this is Autumn, my sister," he said and extended his hand.

Taran took his hand and they shared a firm shake. "What happened here?" he asked, looking around curiously.

Wood was still sizing Taran up a bit. "Evil Power Ranger," he said simply.

Taran had to smile at the kid. "I see. Well, if you need an extra hand, I got two," he said, even though he could see other people cleaning up and watching them curiously.

Autumn gave him a smile. "That would be appreciated. Thank you," she said. He nodded and got to work.

Tori sent Wood a shy smile. It ended in a puzzled frown when he didn't return it right away. Strange. Well, no matter. Taran being there was surely a good sign.

-x-

Roki sat in a contemplative silence on his throne. His monster ran away. What kind of self respecting

monster runs from a fight? He groaned and rubbed his forehead.

He was unaware of the large, black widow spider with a red skull on her abdomen skittering her way into the Palace on the Moon, making her way along expertly. She'd never been there before but if she had it her way, she'd be staying awhile. She made her way toward Roki. She'd been instructed to seek out Zita, but what her mother didn't know wouldn't hurt her. She found him in the throne room, stretched out lazily in his throne as he nursed his headache.

She wasn't concerned if she was bothering him. She could be careless. She began crawling up his leg.

Roki went completely still as he spotted the humongous spider crawling over him. She made her way over his lap and up his chest and down his arm until she perched on the arm of the throne. In a wispy puff of black smoke, she took another form.

The form was a lovely girl with pale golden skin, slightly slanted, fathomless black eyes, and black hair with a sharp widow's peak. It was pulled into a drooping coif with strands escaping. She wore a ragged black prom dress and her long legs were clad in torn black stockings and strappy black heels. She looked like a prom date from hell but it all seemed to work for her.

She gave him a wicked smile and crossed her legs as she made herself comfortable on the chair arm. "Good evening," she said as if she hadn't just copped a spidery feel and intruded uninvited.

Roki was rather perplexed, and yes, intrigued at this new turn of events. He was seemingly relaxed. "Just who are you?" he asked, cocking a brow. He wasn't overly worried about his safety. He was a power magician in his own right, plus he had combat training for years.

She flashed him another grin and hopped down from the throne, landing easily even in her stiletto heels. She blew a strand of hair out of her face. "I am Widow," she introduced. "I believe our mothers were good friends before the Tragedy," she said with a dramatic bent. She was referring to the fact that Rita and Zedd had been turned Good.

"Yes. The Tragedy. And your mother would be Scorpina?" he asked as he watched her with a mix of fascination and wariness.

"You would be correct. Mother feels just awful about the Tragedy and is looking for a way to help those who were...infected," she said with a slight sneer in her voice. "Her activities, however, were a bit curtailed with the birth of my brother and sister," she added.

Roki nodded. "Then why have you come?" he asked bluntly.

Widow flashed him a mischievous smile. "Why, to show that my family is still loyal to the Palace of the Moon. I have brought a gift," she answered. A small box formed in her hands. She opened the lid to reveal ten softly glowing, multicolored orbs. "Your mother knew her dark magic, so I figured why mess with what works. Using ten candles, I've sucked the powers from the Sol System's guardian Reavers."

Roki stood and moved closer to inspect the orbs. The power throbbing from them was palpable.

Widow laughed, a soft, sultry sound laced with wicked glee. She picked up the Red Orb and stared at it. "Dear brother was the first to go," she said, satisfaction written all over her face.

"Dear brother?" Roki asked, trying to remember what he knew of Scorpina and Goldarr's family. It wasn't much.

Widow nodded. "Tarantules has shamed our family by being Good you know," she said with a scowling pout. She put the Red Orb back in the box and closed the lid. A white candle, barely a stub, burning weakly appeared on top of it. "This is the last. Her powers shall complete the set soon," she added.

She peeked at him. "So, milord Roki, a gift from Goldarr, Scorpina and Widow. A gift of fealty," she said wickedly and gave a low mocking bow, more for the purpose of showing off her cleavage than respect for him.

Roki admired the view for a moment. He noticed she still hadn't exactly given him the box. "Is there a price for this gift of fealty?" he asked suspiciously.

Zita tromped into the throne room, in her usual Lolita. She was most displeased with her Skeleton Ranger. She stopped short and eyed Widow shrewdly. "Who is this?" she demanded sharply.

Widow straightened and widened her eyes in feigned surprise. "My, my. How rude. Who are you?" she shot back and put a hand on her hip.

Roki grinned slightly. "That's my sister Zita. As you well know," he added, wondering at the game the girl was playing.

Zita scowled. "Why is she here?" she demanded, still not speaking to Widow.

Widow pursed her lips. "That is my business, dear," she said not quite sweetly.

Zita grunted. "Whatever. I'll find out eventually, dear," she responded and tromped out of the throne room.

Roki cleared his throat. He had a feeling things were about to get interesting. "So tell me, what kind of powers do these Orbs have?" he asked curiously.

Widow made the box disappear. "The Red one is the most powerful. It gets its power from the Sun, so naturally it has the most power. The White, Orange and Gray ones seem the second most powerful, and the rest are about even," she explained. A sudden wicked glint came to her eyes.

Roki was beginning to like that look. He forced himself to focus.

"They all get their power from one major source," she said as a smile curved her lips. lips as she held out her hands and a bottle appeared.

The room lit up with dim light emanating from the bottle. Inside was a small woman sleeping. She seemed to be on fire, but upon closer inspection one could see that she -was- fire. She had golden skin,

but her hair and her garments were softly flaring flames. "Solaria, spirit of the Sun, guardian of the system. Needless to say, it wasn't easy getting her into this bottle and putting her to sleep," she said.

"How did you manage it?" he asked. He was now duly impressed with this woman.

Widow shook her head almost thoughtfully. "She's so good, she'd never think of the underhanded and terrible lies and sneakiness I could perpetrate. Ah, it was such fun," she said with a fond sigh. She made the bottle vanish. She smiled at him without all the exaggerated flirtiness. He liked it much better.

"Well, anyway. I think I shall find a room for my stay here," she said and vanished in a puff of black smoke.

"Don't ask my permission or anything," Roki said dryly to himself. He sat down and began to plot what could be done with those orbs if she ever named her price for them. Things were about to get interesting around the Moon Palace. He smiled, oddly looking forward to it.

-X-

Rei made her way back to the Youth Center. She really didn't know how to explain herself to Autumn and Winter. She ran off from her job without a job and gone for hours. She still didn't want to give up looking. Somehow she knew she had to help the Skeleton Ranger. That made no sense, he was evil and under control of that evil girl with her face. She just hoped the make-up and crazy hair the other girl had kept everyone from realizing how similar they looked.

She chewed on her thumb as she crept in the back of the Youth Center. She looked around sadly when she saw the clear plastic tarp covering the windows. She had to do something about this. Luckily, everyone seemed to be abed. She crept up to her room where she could think. She'd face Autumn and Winter in the morning.

x-The End Chapter 4-x-To Be Continued-x

## 5 - Something Wicked .2

Taran Goldsmith walked into the Youth Center, rubbing his neck. He had a kink in it. Instead of staying in Fey's nice hotel suite she book, he took up residence on Tori and Dawn Feather's couch. It was not meant for a man of his size. He wasn't exactly huge, but neither was that couch. Tori had objected, but he wasn't to be budged. He transferred all his UC Angel Grove to keep an eye on her and he couldn't very well do that from a hotel.

He stopped short and looked around. How the hell did they get overnight window replacement?

Autumn was wondering the same thing. She served a few midmorning customers, still marveling over the windows. Rei, she knew, had something to do with this. The other girl had left a note that morning that she was looking for someone and she'd be back later. She smiled as Tori's blond haired 'brother' sat down at the counter. He was still so shiny. Beyond even spooky aura stuff, he was just nice to look at. "Hi. Can you get you something?" she asked with a smile.

"Espresso," he said. Then he smiled at her. It was slow in coming, but well worth the wait. It was wide, honest and bashful. It was as shiny as his aura.

Autumn nodded. "Sure thing," she murmured and turned away quickly to make the espresso.

Sora eased his way into the Youth Center. He was tired of feeling like a load of bricks had been dropped on his head. Waking up sprawled in the middle of his living room floor made him realize it was time to quit playing chicken shoot and come where he was told and wait to be contacted. If what he suspected was happening was really happening then he needed help. Power Ranger help.

He sat down at the counter. He returned the blond guy's friendly nod with a weary one of his own.

Autumn served Taran his espresso. She took in Sora at a glance. When Lani had described the man from the park, she thought it may have been the guy with the badly drawn map from a few days ago. His aura was shiny yet something was murky just beyond her sight. She didn't quite understand what that meant. He also looked like Billie after a week of no sleep and living on caffeine shakes. She offered him a friendly smile. "Hi. Can I get you something?" she asked him.

"If y'have oolong, that would be brill," Sora said and yawned, rubbing his face.

"Coming right up," she said and began making the tea. She had instructions to feel him out. Well, her job gave her the perfect opportunity for that. "I'm Autumn, by the way," she said with a warm smile.

"Sora O'Keefe. Er, yeah. Don' ask. My family is complicated," he said with a small smile.

Autumn chuckled. She heard Tarn give a small snort.

Sora glanced at him with a questioning brow raised.

"Oh, sorry. I just...understand completely," Taran with a sheepish smile.

Sora nodded. "Then here's to complicated families," he said and raised his cup of hot tea. With a slight smile Taran raised his cup of hot espresso. Autumn smiled and went to wait on someone else.

-x-

Widow came awake the instant she was no longer alone. She sighed. "I'd like being intruded upon much better if you were your brother," she declared with a yawn and sat up, stretching. "Excuse me for sleeping in. The last few days masquerading as a goody two shoes moon sprite was exhausting," she said and got to her feet. A puff of smoke and she was dressed in formfitting black, with a beret, black framed glasses, and her hair pulled back at her name. "How may I help you, dahling?" she asked Zita curiously.

Zita grimaced. "Please, don't call me dahling," she said. Her eyes lit up mischievously. "I wanted to talk with you a bit. I have to admit I was rarely impressed with how you handled my brother," she stated.

Widow shrugged. "The trick with men is not to let them get the upper hand. As my future husband, he needs to realize that now," she declared.

Zita raised her brow at that statement, but she had more pressing interests than her brother's love life. "I want a look at that pet firefly of yours," she said with a giggle.

Widow was vaguely suspicious of Zita's motives, but she didn't mind showing off her own deeds. She held out her hands and the bottled goddess appeared. "Isn't she peaceful when she sleeps?" she said with a small frown. She suddenly grinned wickedly and tapped the bottle. Immediately the sleeping goddess became agitated, frowning in her sleep. "Nightmares are such lovely things, aren't they?" she commented absently, watching for a moment.

Zita grinned as well, admiring her handiwork. "We'd heard the rumors of someone destroying the Sol Reaver's Command Ship. I'd like to know what really happened and not just the whispers here and there," she prompted.

"I befriended her. I posed as a displaced moon sprite mad at you here on the palace for having driven all creatures of good away. She was so sympathetic, poor thing. So guileless, so good. Never once did she suspect that as soon as she gave me refuge on the ship, she would be trapped in a bottle, I would steal her Reavers' powers and self destruct the ship. It's all Tarantules' fault really. If he'd just stayed in Kansas and been a good little farm boy, I never would have bothered with such small annoyances," she didn't take her eyes away from the bottle and the sleeping goddess as she spoke.

Zita smiled wryly. "That must have been fun, if exhausting," she remarked. "I know about your brother. Roki, poor dear, is a tad myopic. He's always doing and experimenting. I'm always listening and learning," she said musingly. "But surely you want more revenge than merely stripping him of his and his precious Reavers' powers," she added. She wasn't sure if she liked or detested this woman. She had to respect her, though. She was immersed in the dark arts and was blatantly powerful and devious.

Widow shrugged. "I'm not doing it for revenge. Tarantules would never do -anything- to warrant such a thing, especially to his evil family. We are his family," she gave an annoyed sigh. "Unfortunately Mother and Father seem to ignore his existence and leave him be, but that's just not fun. Making his little human existence miserable is just too delightful," she declared with wicked glee.

She tapped the bottle. "Besides, as long as I have, as you say, my pet firefly here, his misery continues. It's quite distressful that he can't figure out what's happening," she added with a mock sympathetic pout for her brother.

Zita nodded. "So, why is he in Angel Grove?" she asked suddenly.

Widow's face darkened. "What?" she demanded. She stomped a foot and drew a circle in the air. "I spy, with my little eye, Tarantules," she intoned. The air shimmered and a viewing portal opened up revealing the image of Taran and Sora at the Youth Center. "There he is," she said and made a face. "Isn't he just so...handsome?" she spat. "He must be watching over the remaining Reaver," she grumbled and waved the portal away.

Zita was livid. What was Sora doing there? "Excuse me. I have to do some research. That one with the messy hair and pretty face is a pet project of mine and he's refusing to cooperate," she said with a snarl.

Widow nodded. "If you need any help, just let me know. I believe I'll go help your brother locate his missing monster," she declared and finally sent the bottle away.

Zita nodded and disappeared in a puff of purple smoke. Widow disappeared in a puff of black smoke. The moon rats thought it was pretty.

-X-

Billie and Danny went to the Command Center after school. "Ok, Beez. We have something to discuss with you," Billie stated

"You, too, Dr. Bill," Danny added.

Both Beez and Billy looked at them curiously. They unfurled several blueprints they'd been working on for several days. They were highly detailed plans for building an android shell with a brain and nervous system that worked almost like a humans.

"I do not understand," Beez said.

"We want to build you a new body. One that allows you to be able to leave the CC if you need or want to," Billie explained. She went on to explain various other upgrades and specifications, including emotions, integration into the Command Center's central computer.

"However, we're a bit hindered when it comes to the plasma and skin substitute," Danny added.

"Nodroz Corporation will have the supplies you need," Beez explained.

"Really?" Billy asked, surprised. He didn't think an Earth company had such supplies.

"I'll will place an order. How much do you need?" Beez asked.

"I thought Nodroz was a plastics and fuel company. Eh, guess that makes sense. I don't think we can afford it though," Danny said thoughtfully.

"Order has been placed. Do not worry, Danny," Beez assured him.

Billie, Danny and Billy all shared a look. "Well, we'll go get started with what supplies are here," Danny stated. Billie nodded and they took their blue prints and went to take over Alpha 5's lab again.

Billy chuckled. "If you need help, let me know," he called after them. They muttered something that sounded like an affirmative. "What do you think, Beez?" he asked her.

Beez has rudimentary emotions. Her eyes glowed warmly. "I am, happy," she said. Billy grinned at her.

-x-

Lani walked into the Youth Center without her friends. Holly had been awfully busy helping her dad with his work project lately and Manny was helping her grandmother make tamales today. Supposedly, she was supposed to bring Lani some when they were through. Abby Vallertes made tamales twice a week to fill orders taken in previous days. Manny didn't always have to help, but one of Abby's friends that usually helped was ill.

Lani glanced around, seeing who all was there. She spotted Chloe sitting with Nathan and Wood. She gave a bemused smile. "This is an unusual sight," she said with a smile and joined them.

"And you're joining us isn't unusual?" Chloe asked with a raised brow and sucked on her straw.

"Danny and Billie are doing something for our friend Bea," Nath explained, using a name they decided they could use to talk about the android girl. "We were considering going to join them but then we decided we wouldn't get any of it," he added with a grin.

"Yeah, Danny is the only freak of nature genius in our family," Chloe added.

"Where's Tori? The two of you are usually inseparable," Lani remarked innocently.

Chloe wasn't the one who answered her. "Probably off with her so-called brother from Kansas," Wood muttered.

Lani didn't miss the smile Nath hid by sticking the straw of his smoothie in his mouth. "What?" she asked.

Chloe grinned. "Tori's hanging with this old friend of hers she met a cheer comp when she was in junior high. They've kept in touch for years. Now he's come to Angel Grove," she explained. She grinned and leaned in close. "He's also very attractive, which is why Wood's nose is out of joint," she explained in a



whisper.

Wood sent her a glare even though he didn't hear what she said, he knew Danny's sister well enough to guess.

Lani shook her head at them. "I think that's my cue to order something to eat. Family training at five. Fun times," she muttered and rolled her eyes. She moseyed up to the bar, pausing beside Tai and Rex who were in conversation with Autumn.

Winter smiled at her. "What can I get you?" he asked.

"Grilled chicken salad with raspberry ice tea," she said, and nodded toward the trio. "What's up over there?" she asked.

"Autumn saw that guy who was looking for the Power Rangers," he answered quietly.

Tai glanced over at them and nodded. "Autumn was just telling me her opinion of him," he explained.

Autumn nodded. "I think we should hear what he has to say," she explained. "I'm just not sure how to go about it without giving away the big secret," she added and chewed on her bottom lip.

Lani considered it. "Maybe we could teleport him to the CC and have someone speak with him," she glanced around, "morphed," she added in a low whisper.

Tai nodded thoughtfully. "That's not a bad idea, but I hate the thought of someone harmful getting into the CC," he added.

"Hey, I told you, I don't think--"

"It's ok, Autumn. We know, you don't think he has an evil aura," Rex said with a smile. "But you know the saying, better safe than sorry," he added.

Autumn sighed. "I know, I know," she sighed. She also really worried about Rei. She hadn't returned yet. Autumn knew who she was looking for, she just didn't know why. It worried her greatly that the other girl was actively searching out the Skeleton Ranger.

"Well, what about a containment field?" Winter questioned, showing that he'd been listening while he worked.

Lani glanced at Tai to see what he thought about that suggestion. "It sounds good to me, if the Blues can pull it off," she offered.

Tai nodded. "I'll speak with them about it," he said and while he couldn't quite get the nerve to fully smile, his face softened slightly. Lani took that as a good sign.

-x-

Widow lounged in Roki's throne while he was using his telescope to look for Wormster. "Ready to quit being stubborn and ask for my help? I've actually been thinking, I could use this monster to make a point," she declared.

"What kind of point would that be?" Roki questioned, frustration making him more sardonic than ever.

"I believe it would be a point about Tarantules," Zita said as she came into the room. She was every bit as ill pleased as Roki. "I'll ask for your help, then. Find the monster so we can cause a little chaos," she suggested.

Roki grunted and kicked the base of the telescope. "Yes, yes, fine. I admit defeat. I ask for help," he said and eyed her. For whatever reason she felt it necessary to lounge on his throne wearing a black bunny suit, which only distracted him more.

Widow got to her feet and puffed a change of outfit, wearing a black lab-coat and thin chic glasses. She drew a circle in the air. "I spy with my little eye, Wormster," she stated. The air shimmered and a viewing portal formed, showing the monster hiding in a sewer with stray dogs around him.

Roki scoffed. "Finster should be ashamed of himself for this one," he declared.

"I spy with my little eye, Earth Reaver." The view changed to show Tori Williams heading toward the Youth Center. She did not look too pleased. "Have your monster attack her," Widow suggested. "I'm eager to complete my set," she said with a kittenish smile.

Roki inclined his head. He disappeared in a puff of gray smoke.

Zita smirked. A puff of purple made her combat suit appear.

"Ooh, I like that," Widow stated. Another puff of black smoke made a solid black version appear. "Shall we take our seats now?" she asked.

Zita smirked. "Yes, let's," she agreed and the two of them puffed away.

-x-

Tori was not a pleased person. First thing after school she went to Fey's posh hotel suite and listened to them all try and boss her around. Well, she got fed up and left the lot of them, even Taran. Oh their intentions were good, she knew that. It just wasn't the only thing wrong.

The worst thing seemed to be that Wood was mad at her. She didn't like that one tiny bit.

She stopped short when a monster appeared and began shooting worms on people. "Yeah, like I'm going to be able to ignore that," she muttered.

Zita stood on a building near the scene with a large black widow on her shoulder. Widow was waiting for her moment to make a dramatic entrance. Roki appeared beside them both. He wore a gray and blood red battle suit with smaller spikes than Zita's flashy ones. "Damn monster," he muttered.

-X-

The new alarm system in the Command Center was working perfectly. Alarms went off as soon as Wormster reappeared from hiding. "Ay yi yi. Contacting Rangers," Beez announced.

-X-

Tori pulled out her cell phone and it changed into a communication device. "Taran. I have a situation here," she said.

"Stay out of it, whatever it is," Taran told her over the communicator, even as he began running from the room at the hotel Fey had just arranged for him.

"Stop trying to baby me!" she said. She cut off communication.

Rangers began appearing until all of them surrounded Wormster. Z Putties appeared as well.

Tori had to help. She couldn't not. She took off the white crystal she always wore around her neck. "Spirit of Earth!" The crystal glowed, engulfing her in light, turning her body iridescent and translucent as a white and gold power suit formed around her. A helmet and a cape were the last things to form.

Widow inwardly smirked as the White Reaver revealed herself.

The femme Black Ranger was taken aback as the girl in white joined the fray. "I hope your on our side, whoever you are," she said and summoned her Power Axe.

The White Reaver nodded curtly. She knew that voice, though it was distorted and hollow from inside the helmet. No way! She'd handle the fact that her best friend was a Power Ranger later. "Fans of Earth!" Twin, bladed fan appeared in her hands as she began cutting down Z Putties.

Taran finally made it to the location of the battle. "Dammit," he cursed when he spotted the White Reaver. He also saw Roki and Zita watching nearby. He scowled. Things were not looking good.

Widow cackled silently to herself. The spider that she was vanished in a puff of black smoke, only to have her reappear more or less in between the battle and Taran. She smirked evilly. "The key players have arrived," she declared. She blew a kiss in Taran's direction. "Hello, brother dear," she greeted mockingly.

Taran paled. "Widow? What?" He took in her self satisfied smirk. All the key players? What did she mean by-- "It was you!" he declared, and mentally staggered. It was amazing how much it could hurt, being the only Good amidst an Evil family. "They wouldn't have let you interfere!" he denied loudly.

Widow merely shrugged. "Not intentionally, no. But, like I've always said, what Mother doesn't know won't hurt her," she said. "Have the monster attack the White one!" she called to the Repulsas.

Roki gave a nod. He made a jerking movement with his fist. Wormster turned his gun on the White

Reaver. He fired, but she whirled, bringing up one fan to block the worms.

"Hey! Who the hell is that evil chick?" the male Black Ranger wondered even as he smacked a Z Putty with the end of his Scythe.

"How dare you!" Taran shouted at Widow.

Widow flicked a non-existent piece of link from her shoulder. "Dear, brother, I am Evil. I don't need a reason to do evil. It's just the way things are," she declared nonchalantly. She was rather enjoying herself, seeing his shocked expression.

"The question is, who the hell is the nut job shouting at her?" the male Red added, meaning Taran.

Wormster was intent on getting to the White Reaver.

"No!" Taran shouted, unaware he was being called a nut job. He started to rush into the fray.

"I don't know who she is, but the monster wants her. Wood, Nath, Chloe, close ranks around her," the male Red ordered, using an internal helmet communication.

Widow smirked at him. "You stay out of it. You're powerless," she taunted.

Taran glanced at her coldly. These two siblings, son and daughter of Goldarr and Scorpina did not get along. They never have. Things happened when they were children that resulted in Tarantules turning Good. His parents sent him to Earth where he was adopted by Kent and Lainie Goldsmith. They gave him their name and shortened his to Taran.

"Not completely powerless," he said and pulled a leather cord from around his neck. He always wore it and the Red Reaver Crystal. Being held by the cord was a golden coin with a stegosaurus embossed onto it.

Widow's eyes widened. "Where did you get that?! That's father's most prized possession!" she snarled and reached for it.

He was already out of her reach, jumping back and landing easily a few feet away. "It was a gift. Father sent it to me when I turned eighteen," he said. "I think I've finally figured out how to use it," he added musingly.

"That guy have a Power Coin?" the male Blue demanded.

The male Yellow was trying to make his way quickly to the White Reaver, but Z Putties were preventing him.

Taran held up the Coin. It dissolved into his hand.

"No!" Widow shouted.

Golden cuffs fully formed. "It's morphin' time!" He crossed his wrists. "Stegosaurus!" He morphed into a gold and white ranger with a shiny golden helmet reminiscent of the dino. A large mace appeared in one hand.

The White Reaver, reeling from this evil dog calling Taran her brother, was knocked for a loop when he turned into a Power Ranger.

Widow cursed and made a large sword appear in one hand. She rushed forward, using her preternatural abilities. He blocked her.

Wormster took advantage of the White Reaver's distraction and knocked her flying back. She landed hard on the ground. Her transformation failed. The Pink Ranger managed to get airborne as made his way over to her since the femme Black Ranger and the Yellow Ranger were still trying to get to her. "Tori!" the Yellow shouted.

Widow jumped back and gave a smirk of delight. "It's mine!" she cackled and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Roki and Zita shared a look. "Let's go have a look at this power of hers," Zita suggested.

Roki nodded. "Destroy the Rangers or be destroyed!" he ordered Wormster. The two of them disappeared.

The Gold Ranger pushed his sister from his mind and used his giant mace to barrel through putties. He brought the instrument against Wormster's face as he was preparing to fire again. "I told you to stay out of it," he told Tori. She gave him a mulish expression.

The Pink Ranger was grinning behind his helmet. "Hey, Tori," he said to get her attention.

She turned so fast she almost got whiplash at the sound of Nathan's voice. "Wha--" He took her hand and placed a piece of metal in her hand.

"Pterodactyl," he told her.

Her eyes widened. "Pterodactyl!" she said firmly. Pink energy spread from him to her, forming metallic pink cuffs around her wrists before spreading to engulf her, making a female version of his power suit appear.

The femme Pink Ranger looked at herself and nodded. "I can work with this," she said, feeling the strength of the suit.

"Glad to have another Pink around," the male Pink said.

The Green Rangers looked at each other. "Tori?" they mused at the same time. The femme Green glanced at the Gold Ranger as she jabbed a Z Putty with her staff. She supposed that explained all the shiny lights.

The femme Black looked at the femme Pink. "Well, this is...you have some explaining to do," she stated.

"I'm not the only one," came the response. "Power Fans!" White and Pink fans appeared. She once again began to take down Putties.

Wormster attempted to attack the Gold Ranger but another swing of his mace had the monster staggering back.

"Power Blaster," the femme Red declared. "Power Sword! Power Lance! Power Axe! Power Bow! Power Daggers!" The five weapons came together.

"Oh, no. But who will save the puppies?" Wormster moaned a split second before he was blasted. He exploded. What was left of him began to bubble and he grew. He grew to the size of a small house. He looked down at himself. "Eh?"

The male Black cocked his head. "I'm no expert, but I don't think that was supposed to happen like that," he said.

"Well, what do we do now? We don't have any Zords," the Yellow Ranger stated.

"Add the other weapons to the Cannon. Power Sais!"

"Power Scythe!"

"Power Fans!"

"Power Staff!"

"Power Dagger!"

The added addition of these weapons gave the Power Cannon the boost it needed to completely destroy Wormster.

The male Red nodded. "Bring them," he said gesturing to the femme Pink and the Gold Ranger.

Before she could ask what or where, the Yellow Ranger took her hand and teleported with her.

The Green Rangers flanked the Gold Ranger. They latched on to him and teleported as well. The day saved, the other Rangers teleported as well.

-X-

Roki grunted and turned from the telescope. Well, at least now he realized what he had to do to get the growth serum working. Zita trudged off to work on solving her Skeleton Ranger problem. He moved through the Palace and entered Widow's room without knocking.

She was admiring her now complete collection. "Yes?" she asked when he entered.

He propped against her doorjamb. "What is the price of my gift of fealty?" he asked her, nodding toward the box.

Widow considered this. "The price would vary by person. I could give them to you or auction them off on Onyx to whomever can give me what I want," she remarked with a slight smirk.

Roki quirked a brow. "What is it you want?" he asked her.

She approached him and ran the tip of one black lacquered nail down his chest. "I have aspirations, you see. I have the power to back them up. The Reavers', my own," she said thoughtfully. She whirled away from him. "I want to be a queen, and I need a king at my side. The man who gets me, and trust me, dark prince, it's not easy, will have at his side a true partner," she said and moved away, snapping the box closed.

Roki felt a mild flight response. What the devil did she mean? "Are you gifting yourself or the Orbs?" he asked.

She gave a slight shrug. "Both I suppose," she said and glanced over her shoulder at him. "A union between our families would be much lauded, you know. And together, our power, can you imagine it?" she asked. She made the box disappear. She puffed another outfit change. She wore a slinky black negligee and a sheer robe. Her hair fell down around her shoulders.

Roki appreciated the change, yet he was still wary. "A union? You mean marriage?" he asked, reeling slightly.

Widow gave a throaty laugh and approached him again. "The benefits far outweigh the negatives. You get the Orbs, my power and me. All I ask in return is fidelity. Unless you're waiting around for your true love or some such silly thing like that," she added with a slight scoff. Widow loved no one, not even herself. She felt a certain fondness for her parents and younger siblings, true, but not love. She was incapable.

Roki straightened, moving out into the hall and away from her allure. He began to pace as he thought. She watched from the doorjamb he'd vacated.

Zita poked her head out of her room. "Ugh, I'm trying to work, do you mind?" she demanded of her brother.

Widow sent a smile toward her. "Sorry, dove. We were just discussing our future marital bliss. He's currently in flight mode," she explained.

Roki stopped and glared at his sister. "What do you have to say about this?" he demanded.

Zita grimaced. "You could do worse. I was beginning to think you'd end up sculpting yourself a woman from Finster's clay," she declared.

Roki's offended expression amused her to no end. "I'm not that desperate thanks," he growled. She

cackled and closed her door. He turned toward Widow. "If it's to be done, I'll do it right, dammit," he muttered and got down on one knee. "Widow, will you marry me?" he asked her.

Widow was strangely charmed. "Yes," she said and leaned down and kissed his forehead. "I'll begin preparations. We can be married in a couple of days," she declared and closed the door in face.

He blinked. "We can't even celebrate?" he demanded.

"Not until the wedding night. What kind of girl do you think I am?" she called back. The door came open again and she grinned to see him still down on one knee. She knelt and leaned forward. "Don't worry, my prince. It'll be well worth the wait," she told him in a breathy whisper.

Roki leaned toward her but she escaped again and his lips met door. He growled again. He didn't doubt for a moment it would be. He got to his feet and shuffled off to work on a few special projects, including perfection of the growth serum.

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Tai paced around the Command Center. "So, let me get this straight. There are a group of guardians living in a special command ship orbiting the sun and their job is to guard the Solar System. And you and Tori were two of them? Until this Widow somehow captured Solaria, Goddess of the Sun, and blew it up. Widow also just happens to be your sister and now she's joined forces with Zita and Roki?" he summarized everything Taran and Tori had been telling them.

Taran nodded. "That about sums it up," he agreed.

Wood grinned at Tori. "So, Taran is your leader?" he asked her, trying not to sound too relieved.

Tori smiled. "And like a big brother," she stated.

"Not anymore," Taran stated. "We're Power Rangers now, though I'm still going to figure out a way to free Solaria and restore the Reaver Powers," he added.

"We'll help where we can," Lani assured him with a smile.

"Thanks," Taran said with his bashful smile. "We need to go explain things to our team mates who came to Angel Grove, too," he said.

"The African and English women and the Australian guy?" Wood asked. "Do you mind if I tag along? I'd be awesome to meet them," he said.

"Me, too. You kept this part of your life secret for a long time. No more," Chloe scolded Tori.

"Lani and I should meet them, too," Tai stated.

Taran nodded. "Fine by me," he agreed.



Billie had been mostly quiet, working on Winter's containment field idea. "Where did your coin come from?" she asked.

Beez answered. "It is one of the lost coins created by Zordon and my father. There were six, three of them were hidden and three of them were stolen. The Gold, Silver and Violet Coins have been lost for centuries," she explained. "The Platinum, Titanium and Bronze Coins were sent away with Alpha 1. Not even father knew where they ended up," she added.

Taran nodded. One of them, somehow, ended up in the hands of Goldarr. He had managed not to reveal who his and Widow's parents were. He probably wouldn't be able to dance around the subject for long, but for now, he was avoiding it.

"We'd better get going," Tori suggested with a smile. Taran nodded. He teleported, the others behind him. Fey, Ros and Hayden were in for one hell of a shock.

-x-

Rei returned to the Youth Center. She was tired, and there had been no Skeleton Ranger at the battle earlier. She knew she had explaining to do to Autumn and Winter. She was not looking forward to trying explain what she did not understand herself.

She nearly ran into Sora as he was exiting. They stilled, staring at each other. "Excuse me, luv," he murmured and stepped aside for her.

"My fault," she murmured, wondering why her heart was suddenly pounding in her ears. They lingered, looking at each other for a moment longer. "Have we--"

"Met before?" Sora finished the question. "I'd like to think I'd remember a lass like you," he said, making an attempt at being charming. Yet she was familiar to him. She reminded him of someone.

She gave a small smile. "Maybe we could run into each other again sometime," she suggested quietly.

He nodded his head. "I'd like that. Good day," he said and tipped his head, walking out the door.

Rei watched him walking away until he turned a corner and was out of sight. Oh, my. What was that feeling? Why was he so familiar? Was he the one she was looking for? Pushing her questions aside, she went to face the music with Winter and Autumn.

x-The End Chapter 05-x

## 6 - Playing Chicken

### Palace on the Moon

Widow and Roki were married in a quiet ceremony with Roki's uncle Rito Revolto presiding. Widow's parents and younger siblings had come all the way from Rachnemaere, her mother's home world. They were so proud to welcome Roki into the family.

The army green skeleton warrior that was Rito Revolto announced them man and wife and after a week of frustration and teasing, Roki finally managed to get his lips on her. They didn't come up for air until Rito loudly cleared his throat. Roki was gratified to see, if only briefly, she was as stunned as he was at the power of a single kiss.

"I give you Roki and Widow Repulsa," Rito announced. A smattering of applause from their audience of family, Finster and Putties erupted.

Scorpina came forward. She was tall woman in golden armor and had Oriental features. Her skin even glowed with a gold-ish hue. "Congratulations, my dears," she said and hugged her daughter and kissed her new son-in-law on the cheek.

"Thank you, Mother," Widow said with a faint smile.

Goldarr, a blue skinned warrior in golden armor strode forward and hugged his daughter. He shook Roki's hand vigorously. "The people your parents used to be would be so pleased," he stated.

Roki's face tightened slightly. "Yes," he agreed.

Rito came up behind them and wrapped his bony arms around both their shoulders and squeezed. "Give ol' Uncle Rito a hug," he said jocularly. "This is a celebration, where's the food?" he asked and looked around expectantly.

Zita, who had a soft spot for the Uncle who'd practically raised her brothers and herself, smiled. "We arranged for food in the kitchen," she said.

"All right. C'mon, Goldy. Let's get our grub on," he invited Goldarr.

"Go on, I'll be there with the children soon," Scorpina said.

As Rito and Goldarr walked off, Zita approached the two small children. They both had the golden hued skin of their mother, though the son was definitely darker than the daughter. They appeared to be around four, but she knew the time lapse wasn't that long. They grew at a rate twice that of a human until they came to the equivalence of a ten year old human, then things leveled out for another twenty years or so before slowing to near agelessness.

"They're sickeningly adorable," she declared.

The little boy had a mulish expression on his face. He had dark eyes and hair like his mother. The little girl hung behind him shyly while she sucked on her thumb. She had sparkly blue eyes and golden blond hair. "What did you say their names were?" she queried.

"Grifforzer and Lammy," Scorpina answered proudly.

"They've grown a bit since I last saw them. How long will you be staying?" Widow asked, hoping she could keep torturing Tarantules without her parents interfering.

"Awhile. I'm going to make sure you leave your brother be," Scorpina said sternly.

Widow's expression suddenly mirrored Grifforzer's. "Mother," she started.

"Don't 'Mother' me. Do what you will to the other Power Rangers but don't directly interfere with him again. It's not his fault he was caught in that despicable wave," she declared and gathered her babies to her and strode off to the kitchen.

Roki had been watching silently. Perhaps, in some respects, they were lucky they didn't have parents telling them what to do. He glanced at his sister. He could tell she was thinking the same thing. He approached Widow and placed a hand on the small of her back. "My dear, I believe we have wedding gifts to exchange. Remember, I am your husband now. Your battles are mine. I don't have to leave him be," he said.

Widow looked up at him in wicked glee and something not quite definable. A puff of black smoke made her black wedding dress vanish and replaced it with her black lab coat and glasses. "To Finster's lab," she said and led the way.

"Coming?" Roki asked his sister.

"Oh, absolutely," she agreed and followed the couple.

Roki had been busy while Widow was making wedding preparations. He'd designed three new monsters and had Finster begin their construction. Zita had helped by doing surveillance. He believed he'd come up with a collaboration that would benefit them all.

Three clay figures were on Finster's work table. They all looked like strange, random amalgamations of women and birds with some horns thrown in for good measure.

"What are they to be?" Widow asked as she studied them with keen interest.

"I call them the Harphuries," he answered. "My gifts if you will?" he reminded her.

Widow smirked and made the box appear. She presented it to him with a flourishing bow. "For my lord husband," she said.

Roki grinned and took the box. "You see, my sister's snarky remark about sculpting a woman made me think," he said. He picked up the first Harphury and set her in Finster's kiln. He pulled out the Blue, White and Pink orbs and set them at the figures feet. He activated the kiln. The figure and orbs moved through the kiln and came out the other end.

The Harphury reflected the colors of the orbs. They were clearly visible in her tall forehead. "Vivexia!" she announced.

As Widow and Zita watched curiously, Roki repeated the process with the Orange, Green and Gray orbs. The monster announced herself as Sedulinia. Finally, with the Yellow, Black and Violet orbs the Harphury known as Minxinia appeared.

"They're rather ugly," Zita remarked.

Roki just grinned. "My dears, if you would," he said.

Vivexia spread her arms and her shape began to change. She now more resembled a young Asian girl with dark eyes, long dark hair and a shapely figure. Sedulinia changed her shape to a girl with warm skin, red hair and light blue eyes. Minxinia changed her shape to an athletic looking blond with a killer figure.

Widow raised her brows and looked at her new husband. "Explain," she said.

"Worry not, my lady. They aren't for me. They're gifts for the Power Rangers," he assured her. She nodded thoughtfully as a smile began to tug at her lips.

"What about the other one?" Zita asked, seeing that he had kept the Red orb.

Roki produced a staff. It was a simple staff really. He attached the Red orb to it. "It belongs to me now," he declared.

"Indeed, it does," Widow agreed. "Dispatch your fiends, my lord. I suddenly feel the need to celebrate our nuptials," she said and pressed herself against his side.

With a broad smile, Roki looked at the monsters. "You know what to do. Be gone," he ordered them. He glanced at his sister. "What will you be doing?"

Zita shrugged. "Suppose I can mess with Sora some more," she answered without much conviction. He was still resisting her control, but it was still fun to jerk him around. She wandered off from the newlyweds to attempt to find another spell to try on him.

Roki looked down at Widow. He supposed this arrangement could be worse. She glanced up at him, raising her brow at him. "Let's go celebrate," he said and led her out of the lab.

-x-

Sora felt like he was being watched. He didn't know if he was paranoid, if it was a good watching or a

bad watching. He'd gone to the Youth Center everyday and waited. The Power Rangers still hadn't contacted him as promised. He was beginning to wonder if they suspected him of being the Skeleton Ranger. He hoped not. He needed to explain himself before they judged him. He paused as he was about to enter the Youth Center. Had he heard something?

He looked around and didn't see anything so he entered the Youth Center. As he moved to the counter he blinked. He was seeing two Autumns?

Serving customers were two younger girls, about fifteen. They both had red hair and brown eyes. They were definitely Bakers. "Hi! What can I get you?" one with short choppy hair asked.

"Chai tea," Sora answered.

The other one, with slightly browner, longer hair said something to her sister and they both giggled as they parted. The first one went about making his tea.

"Surreal, right?" Sora blinked and looked at Taran Goldsmith. "They've been visiting their parents from what I gathered," he explained. The two whispered together again and glanced at them and began giggling again.

"I'll have an espresso," Taran said to them with a slight smile.

"Coming right up," said the punky one as she served Sora his tea. The quieter one started making the espresso.

Taran looked at his watch then around at the patrons. Where the devil were Tori and the other Reavers? He hadn't called this little meeting for his health.

Autumn appeared from the back office. "Spring, phone call," she said. "You have five minutes," she said sternly.

"Whatever," said the punky one as she passed her older sister, but it was said in a good-natured way.

Autumn sighed. She smiled when she saw her sparkly boys. "Hi," she greeted them.

"Hi," Sora murmured. He glanced around to see if Rei was near. As much as she unnerved him, he also felt a strange comfort in her presence.

"So, did Billie clone you or something?" Taran couldn't help asking.

Autumn giggled. "No. They just now got here. They were visiting our parents," she said in a slightly tight, annoyed voice even as she tried to hide it. When she looked passed him, he turned and saw Hayden, Fey and Ros come in. Straggling in behind them were two tall twins with black hair and laughing blue eyes, a lanky guy with brown hair, a small Asian girl with a tight expression and asymmetrical bob, and a willowy Latina.

"Please tell me only three people walked in here," he said and downed his espresso in one go, ignoring

the fact that it was scalding hot. He heard Autumn gasp. He stiffened and quickly left the bar, leaving her watching in surprise. He didn't usually forget so easily not to do things like that.

Autumn grimaced. "Summer, I think the espresso machine's internal thermometer is off," she said, thinking on her feet slightly, but sheesh, that had shocked her. There was a lot she didn't know about her new teammate it seemed.

Winter came up behind the bar. "What's going on?" he asked curiously.

Autumn passed on her concerns about the espresso maker.

She didn't realize all her subterfuge was for naught. Sora wasn't paying attention. Pressure was building behind his eyes. He fumbled in his pocket and paid for his tea and left without a word. Not that he could really speak around the building pressure.

He passed Tori, Wood and a third person without acknowledging them.

Wood frowned and glanced behind him. "I hope the Blues get that containment field done soon. We need to talk with that guy. Like seriously," he declared.

Tori nodded. She groaned when she saw the table of Reavers. "Oh, sheesh. They're all here," she muttered under her breath.

Theodore Jay Jarvis Johnson followed his little brother in the Youth Center wearing a pair of dark glasses and a baseball cap. He wasn't just famous because he was the Blue Astro Ranger. He was also a famous baseball player. He was in town to visit his parents and little brother. It'd been a bit of a shock to learn freckled little Wood was a Power Ranger. He curiously glanced at the table they were looking at. He cocked his head. "Ifeteyo?" he asked thoughtfully.

At the sound of her name, the regal woman glanced up. She didn't recognize the man in the baseball cap. "Yes?" she asked curiously, grateful for the distraction from Taran reading them the riot act for gathering in one place.

Tori and Wood looked at TJ. "You know Fey, TJ?" she asked.

"TJ?" Fey asked. Connections fell into place in her head. "Oh yes! I should have guessed. Theodore Jay!" she said and hustled over. They hugged. "I haven't seen you since we were six," she remarked.

TJ nodded. "Yeah, well, mom still refuses to speak about Aunt LaTonya," he remarked. Laughing at the expression on Wood's face, he explained that Fey and her brother Nyo were their cousins. Their mothers were sisters that fell out over twenty years earlier, before Wood was even born.

"Now you're in for it," Tori told Wood and went to talk to Taran and his bunch.

Flabbergasted, Wood stayed with TJ and Fey to hear the story about their moms.

Lani sat on a blanket in the park with her friends Manny and Holly. They hadn't spent much time together lately. Lani knew it was mostly her fault. Between her duties, training with her family and even band practice, she was stretched thin. Even yoga wasn't much time lately. Holly was still helping her dad and Manny was still helping her Abby.

"This was a fantastic idea," Manny detailed as she nibbled on some cheesecake. "This is going straight to my hips but I don't care," she declared with a smile.

Lani snickered. "We need a girls day every now and then," she agreed. Even though she was getting to know Chloe, Tori and Autumn and even Billie a little better, they weren't her best friends.

Holly nodded. "We do indeed. Love my dad and all but sheesh," she complained and studied the pattern the strawberry sauce made on top of her cheesecake, or seemed to. Neither Manny nor Lani paid her any mind when she got that faraway look in her eyes.

"Oh, my gosh, girl. Look at that," Manny suddenly jostled Lani's arm, making her bite of cheesecake go astray and smear across her cheek.

Muttering under her breath, Lani wiped her cheek and looked to see what got Manny all excited. "Oh, my gosh," she echoed.

Late August was still rather warm for Angel Grove so the two young men engaged in mortal combat with wooden shinai eventually had to go shirtless. They were also covered in sweat. Even Holly came out of whatever deep thoughts she was having to watch Tai and Rex.

Lani knew enough about kendo to know they weren't following any rules. This was out and out combat. Somehow, Rex managed to disarm Tai. Heedless of that fact that if they used real swords, his hands would be massacred, Tai grabbed his opponent's weapon, twisted it and tossed Rex over his shoulder. He poked him in the ribs with his stolen weapon. "I win," he announced with a big grin.

"You cheated. Your ungainly crane-like structure gives you an unfair advantage," Rex declared as he hopped to his feet. He took around. "Where did we leave our stuff?" he asked, realizing they'd come halfway across the park from where they started.

"Geeze, I think I'm starting to see what you see in Tai," Manny teased her friend.

Lani blushed and started to get to her feet when a young woman ran over to the two boys.

"Forgive me, but I grabbed these when I noticed the two of you leaving the vicinity," she said in a soft husky sort of voice. She held out their bags. She gave Tai a glance over and smiled. "I couldn't help watching the match. Congratulations," she said.

Tai nodded mutely and took his bag.

"He says thank you very much. His name is Tai and would like to know yours," Rex said with a grin.

"My name is Ami. It's nice to meet you, Tai," she said with a giggle. "I hope I'll be seeing you around," she said and gave him another appreciative look before sauntering off.

Almost helplessly, Tai stared after her while Rex chuckled at him. "We really have to work on that. You'd think I'd have rubbed off you more after all these years," he said. "Oh, hey, more pretty girls," he said as he noticed the trio watching them. He gave them a wave.

Tai turned to see Manny and Holly return the wave, but Lani wasn't looking at them. She was packing up their dishes and didn't seem to be paying them any attention at all. He sighed. He gave a halfhearted wave as well. "Well at least we got our stuff back," he said and he dug through his bag to make sure that too-pretty girl hadn't taken anything.

Rex raised his eyes skyward.

-x-

Danny was digging through his garage. His mom really hated that most of it was overrun with his computer junk, but he made sure to give her enough room to put her car. He argued that if she got him a car, he would gladly move all his stuff out of the garage. This earned him a hard look and an admonishment to keep everything orderly.

He tried. He really did. He was having trouble locating a specific part. They'd completely built a neoplutonium skeleton for Beta Z. Billie was working hard on the brain, which she was building from new agey stuff from Nodroz Corp that looked like brain matter but actually functioned as a processor, much like a human brain.

So the mundane getting her knees to bend correctly was up to him. "Dang. Guess I ain't got one after all," he grumbled. He straightened up and lifted his mountain bike down from where it was hanging. He had a few options. He knew people who get what he needed.

He rolled his bike out into the street and hopped on. Sometimes he wished his mom had taken him up on his bargain. At the very least he should have gotten a motorcycle or something.

His mind turning to the task at hand, he pedaled down the street. He slowed to a halt as a pretty girl stepped onto the street in front of him. He stopped short. "Whoa. 'Ey, that was a pretty dangerous," he stated.

The girl, a lush redhead blinked big blue eyes at him. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were coming. I can be so flighty sometimes," she giggled.

Danny blinked. Ok. Brainless beauty. "Yeah, well. Be more careful next time," he said and backed up, preparing to go around her.

She pouted and frowned. "Don't you like me?" she asked in a petulant voice.

Danny frowned and backed up some more. Warning bells were going off in his head. "Ah, look. I don't even know you," he said.



"I'm Catriona. You can call me Cat," she said pleasantly with a flirty smile.

"Sure...but I really have to go. I'm in a hurry," he stated and prepared to speed away.

"You don't like me!" she shrieked and hurled an energy blast. It hit his bike and sent him flying. He hit the concrete hard and skidded. Winded and woozy, Danny looked up. The hot babe was beginning to change forms. She was no longer such a hot babe. She was a grotesque monster with horns, feathers and balls in her forehead.

He scrambled to make his communicator appear. "Guys, I'm in a bit of trouble here," he said as he scrambled to his feet.

Sedulinia hurled another energy blast at him. "I'll teach you to reject me!" She shouted.

Danny only just had time to erect a force field, but he was still knocked back a few feet. "Look, lady, tell your masters to do their research! I'm not into the brain-dead kind no matter how nice the wrappings," he said and twisted his wrists making his Morpher appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops! Power Lance!"

He morphed and made his weapon appear and ran at the monster.

-x-

Manny Diaz had enjoyed her day chilling in the park eating cheesecake with her besties. However, all good things had to come to an end. She was dragging her feet on the way to her abuela's building. She cocked her head when she saw a motorcycle parked in the space for their apartment. Abuela didn't own a car. She looked closer at the motorcycle and realized it was strange. It looked a lot like a police cycle, yet not quite.

A sudden realization struck her and she began hurrying toward the entrance of the building with renewed vigor. She stopped short when she spotted a scary figure standing in front of the building flexing his fingers and looking around. "Eek," she gasped.

The Skeleton Ranger spotted her. He began walking toward her.

"Before you start trouble," she said as she backed up, "I'll warn you now, as far fetched as it may, sound, there is a Galactic Policeman in that building behind you right now," she found her voice.

He paused, he glanced at the building then spotted the motorcycle. "Well, that could be fun," he said and began running toward her. He perhaps thought to frighten her. He did, that. She managed to surprise him by ducking down and sweeping his feet out from under him as he neared.

She whirled out of the way as he fell. "Oh, snap! That wasn't good!" she squeaked and began running.

Skeleton Ranger regained his feet and gave chase, just plain ticked off now.

-x-

Billy and Beez got the distress call from Danny as well as detecting the Skeleton Ranger's presence. "Is he chasing that girl?" Billy asked, flabbergasted.

"Ay yi yi! Danny, I'm sending reinforcements now," Beez responded and contacted Tai.

-x-

Rex and Tai were heading to the Youth Center after their practice when their communicators began beeping. When Beez filled them in on the situation, Tai made the decision. "Send Wood, Lani, Tori and Taran after the Skeleton Ranger. Rex will meet them there. The rest of us will handle the monster," Tai said.

Rex glanced at him. "You sure you don't want to handle the Skeleton Ranger?" he asked.

"Did you see that huge honking mace Taran has? I'll leave it to him," Tai declared. "Ready?" Rex nodded. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus!"

"Mastodon!"

-x-

Blue Ranger found himself being knocked back again. Sedulinia laughed. "I've had girl trouble before, but this is ridiculous," he remarked to himself.

"New girlfriend?" the male Pink Ranger asked as he fired on Sedulinia. She knocked aside his bolt and threw a blast of energy at him. He jumped, hovered and fired several bolts in a row.

"Ain't she a peach? Can't wait to take him home to meet Ma," the male Blue Ranger drawled as he got back to his feet.

"She's actually an improvement on your last one. Talk about a monster," the female Black Ranger said. She rushed forward with her Axe to slash at the monster while she distracted by male Pink.

"Oh, yeah, that one," the female Blue Ranger said, distaste evident in her voice. She tapped her helmet and made her computer appear. "Cover me," she said and began her analysis.

"Always," the male Pink Ranger assured her.

The male Red Ranger and the Green Rangers arrived and were engaging the monster with weapons drawn.

The female Green Ranger whirled in with her staff, but Sedulinia was easily able to deflect and knock her back. The male Green Ranger went in close with his dagger but one chicken leg knocked him back. She scoffed at them. Until she lost an arm. With a slice of his blade, the male Red Ranger disarmed her.

"You cut off my arm?" she squawked. She ran around aimlessly, screeching and shouting. She stopped

suddenly when the arm glowed, disappeared and grew out of her body again. "Oh, there it is," she said idly. "You Rangers will have to do better than that," she said. She let out a blast of energy that knocked them all from their feet.

-X-

Manny shrieked and pitched herself forward in a sprawl just as Skeleton Ranger swung an energy blast from his sword. She heard a car explode nearby.

"That's truly pathetic. Picking on a girl half your size and without any powers?" the male Black Ranger remarked as he and the other Rangers appeared.

Skeleton Ranger gripped his sword. "Tell them what you did," he ordered Manny.

"I may have knocked him down with a sweep kick," Manny admitted from her hiding place. She'd hurried out of the way when the Rangers arrived.

The male Yellow Ranger looked at her admiringly. "Seriously? That's so awesome!" He felt the other half of his coin appear in hand. "Yes!" He ran over to her.

Skeleton made a move to stop him, but Gold rushed forward with shocking speed. His mace smashed into Skeleton's chest.

"Oooh, I think I even felt that," male Black winced. He actually stood back and watched them trade blows. "That Tai," he said, shaking his head, marveling over his friend's leadering instincts.

The female Pink Ranger nodded. "Taran might slightly not be human," she admitted.

"This is my surprised face," he said and pointed at his helmet front. She giggled.

Female Red ran over to Manny as well. "Are you ok?" she asked as she helped her to her feet.

Manny dusted herself off. "I'm fine," she said and suddenly looked at the female Red. "La--"

"Did you really sweep kick the Skeleton Ranger?" the male Yellow interrupted. Manny barely managed to nod before he was shoving a shard of metal into her hand. "Say Saber-toothed Tiger," he said. He was stoked to finally find a partner, and she had the stacks to take on the Skeleton Ranger by herself.

"Saber-toothed Tiger?" she repeated, confused. Yellow electricity crackled as the coin dissolved into her hand. It formed yellow cuffs and then a female version of his power suit. She gasped. "No way!" she said.

"Yes!" female Red said and hugged her. "Welcome to the team!"

"You got your partner!" female Pink said and clapped her hands together for Yellow Ranger. He gave her both thumbs up.

Gold stumbled back. "I don't need any help or anything," he grunted.

"You looked like you had it handled," the male Black said. "Power Blasters!" he said. The Rangers, even the newest, drew their blasters and fired on the Skeleton Ranger.

He jerked back with each hit and the ground exploded around him. When the smoke cleared, he was crackling and smoking but still standing. "It'll take more than that," he said.

The Rangers were about to fire on him again when a slim figure in a tattered hood ran between them. "Enough!" she said with authority. She faced the Skeleton Ranger.

"Who're you?" he demanded just before he was hit with a blast of white energy. He crumpled to the ground his Morph beginning to fizzle. She threw something on the ground that obscured the Rangers' vision. When the haze cleared, the Skeleton Ranger and the figure were gone.

"That was odd," the male Black remarked.

"Par for the course, I'd say," the female Red said.

"We have to go help the others," Gold said.

"We what? There's more?" the female Yellow asked.

"We'll explain everything soon, I promise," the female Red said. She reached out and grabbed her. The six of them teleported.

-x-

Sedulinia was clearly winning. And to make things worse, she'd summoned a troop of Z-Putties. The other Rangers appeared in chaos. They jumped into the fray.

"Am I seeing that right? Is that another Yellow Ranger?" the male Red asked the male Black.

"Yep."

"Good. Glitch! You got a weak point yet?" he asked her.

"No, but those three orbs on her head are her centers of power," the female Blue answered.

"Then that's where we aim," he said. "Mega Power Cannon!" he called. The cannon charged, beginning to glow.

Six Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon.

Sedulinia looked at them warily. "What's that?" she demanded.

"Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger. Six points of energy swirled and swept through her. She exploded but almost immediately she grew to enormous proportions. She began trying to stomp on the male Blue.

"Oh, this is not good," female Red said.

"As far as I know, we're still Zordless," male Red said.

"On the contrary. Awaken your Zords," Beez said. "Both of you must do it the first time," she instructed.

The female red reached out and took the male Red's hand. She didn't care if it wasn't totally necessary. "Awaken the Tyrannosaurus-Rex!"

The male Blue ducked behind a tree and grabbed onto the female Blue. "Awaken the Triceratops!"

The Black Rangers bumped fists. "Awaken the Mastodon!"

"Awaken the Pterodactyl!"

"Awaken the Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Awaken the Stygimoloch!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The male Red, male Blue, male Black, female Pink, male Yellow and female Green.

"I take it this doesn't include me," Gold Ranger remarked. There were still more than enough Putties to keep him and the grounded Rangers busy.

"Not yet," Beez answered.

Sedulinia laughed at the Zords. "What are they supposed to be?" she asked and threw an energy blast at them. Each in turn returned volleys of laser blasts at her.

"Megazord time, people. Activating Megazord configuration," the male red hit a rather large button in his cockpit. The Zords began assembling together. The Saber-toothed Tiger Zord and the Mastodon Zord formed legs and feet. The T-Rex Zord formed a torso while the Pterodactyl and Triceratops Zords formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the T-Rex Zord. The Stygimoloch Zord came apart and formed a larger helmet, a body shield and a long sword. The Rangers appeared in a large cockpit.

"Alpha Megazord! Horned Spin Sword Strike!" The sword formed from the StygiZord began spinning and glowing. The Megazord sped forward, rammed the StygiSword into the monster's forehead. The orbs exploded in a three different shockwaves of released power before Sedulinia exploded.

"That was amazing," the male Yellow said in quiet awe.

"I'm just glad it's over," the male Blue declared. "That was just creepy," he said and shuddered.

"Looks like they cleared the Putty Patrol. I think we're done for the day," the male Red said, looking down to where the Rangers on the ground were waving and cheering up at them.

-x-

## **Moon Palace**

"Ugh. That was a disaster," Widow remarked as she and Roki watched the scene through one of her portals from the comfort of their bed.

Roki grunted. "That one jumped the gun too quickly. The next one will have more cunning. What happened to the orbs?" he asked.

"They were destroyed, the power dispersed. Now no one can use them," she answered. She waved away the portal, sick of the scene.

Roki pulled her close to him and kissed her shoulder. "Let's forget about monsters and Power Rangers for the moment," he suggested.

"Hmm. That, my husband, is a wonderful idea," she agreed and turned toward him. She kissed him and they proceeded to forget about monsters and Power Rangers for quite a time.

-x-

Zita growled to herself as she looked around the scene of the Skeleton Ranger's last known location. There had been magic done there. Powerful magic. "Whoever you are, you can interfere all you want. He's still my cursed little puppet," she shouted. She turned on her heel and vanished in a puff of purplish smoke.

-x-

Manny Diaz, the newest Power Ranger, looked around the faces of her team mates, one of them one of her best friends. It explained a bit of Lani's behavior recently. They'd explained everything to her. She still felt faintly overwhelmed.

"Those were Reaver powers," Taran explained to them. Tori nodded.

Tai frowned and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "So, your evil sister stole your people's powers and gave them to Roki and Zita to put in pretty girl monsters?" he asked, not really expecting an answer, just working through the pieces himself.

"So now we have to be wary of hot girls?" Rex asked. "Bummer," he complained.

"Better hide that pretty face of yours," Chloe told him.

Taran nodded. "If Widow has hooked up with those two, it ain't good for us. Course I'd rather the powers be destroyed than used for more evil," he added.

Tai nodded. "There were ten, right? So, we should be expecting at least two more monsters," he said.

"More than likely," Taran nodded.

"Well, if anyone is interested in good news," Billy interjected, "I have a containment field," he announced.

"Great. Who thinks they can get a bit of Sora's DNA?" Tai asked.

"We can. He drinks from our cups," Win answered.

Tai nodded. "Then we'll talk to him as soon as we can program him into the computers. I'm ready to find out why he needs to talk to the Power Rangers," he said.

"We'll get on that ASAP," Autumn assured him.

"Well, for now, you can all go, I guess," he said. People began clearing out of the Command Center until no one was left but the Blues and him and Rex.

"Come on. Let's go," Rex said, giving him a push. "Being all serious Leader Boy all the time will give you wrinkles," he drawled.

"Go suck yourself," Tai said and pushed him back but teleported out of the CC with Rex on his heels.

x-The End Chapter 06-x

## 7 - Rights and Wrongs

Rei watched over Sora as he slept. He'd been out for the last two days. Whatever Zita had done to him last time had erased Sora almost completely from the Skeleton Ranger. She could remember Zita now. She could remember everything now. She knew she owed Autumn and Winter big time explanations but she had to watch over Sora.

She wasn't sure how to explain things to him. They were still so strange to her.

Sora opened his eyes and bolted up right in his bed. "Easy," she said soothingly.

He looked at her and began scrambling away. "Stay away from me," he told her. Things were still a blur but at the moment he was positive of one thing. He was the Skeleton Ranger.

"I'm not Zita, I promise," she said. "I'm her sister. I've been helping you. I think I can even remove the curse she put on you. That last spell she used on you worked far better than I would liked. You've been out for two days," she explained.

Sora ran a hand through his hair. He believed her. "How?" he asked.

"You need to go to the Youth Center. Order something to drink. You need to meet with the Power Rangers before Zita has another chance at you. Embrace your true destiny," she said. She disappeared in a puff of white smoke before he ask her any more questions.

Extremely confused, he got of bed and made preparations to do as she said. Anything to get this curse off his back.

-X-

Taran paced around and eyed the people in the posh hotel suite. The Sol Reavers were made up of humans from around Earth. He and Tori were both Americans. He had been the Red Reaver of the Sun. Tori had been the White Sol Reaver of Earth. Fey had been the Yellow Reaver of Venus and she was African. Ros had been the Gray Reaver of Pluto and from England. Hayden Bly had been the Orange Sol Reaver of Jupiter and he was Australian.

Among the new arrivals, the tall black haired twins, Lance McCall had been the Blue Reaver of Mercury and Dane McCall had been the Green Reaver of Mars were both South African. Ted McFarland was the Violet Reaver of Saturn and from New Zealand. Shen An Dung, the Black Reaver of Saturn was from Vietnam. Yelena Boleiro, the Pink Reaver of Neptune was from Brazil.

He understood that they were concerned and wanted answers but he'd really rather wished they hadn't all converged one place. He'd explained to them what they'd gathered about what happened to their powers and the Command Ship.



"We ain't going nowhere, mate. Get used to us," Ros told him.

"That's right. We're here for the duration. We know you and that new team of yours will figure something out," Fey added and eyed him sternly. As the oldest among them, she usually took a stern motherly role, unless she was meddling in their love lives.

"That's a lot of faith," Taran muttered.

"Absolutely. You've gotten us out of tight spots before. You will do it again," Yelena said. There was a muttering of consent.

Taran sighed. He was humbled by the confidence they had in him. He didn't have a choice. He had to figure out how to fix this.

-x-

The Youth Center in the middle of the day now that school has started was a nearly deserted ghost town. Most of the activity now consisted of college kids filtering in to get in practice or a quick bite between classes.

Autumn watched her brother chatting with a blond woman. She was doing some hardcore flirting. Win was half heartedly flirting back. She rolled her eyes. She wondered what part of being wary of pretty girls hadn't clicked in her brother's thick skull. She took an order and went into the kitchen to fill it.

Rei was manning the stove. She gave a wan smile. "Trying to make up for shifts I missed," she said.

Autumn nodded. "Do we need to talk about this?" she asked. She trusted Rei, her aura marked her as a good person, in a way almost shiny as Sora's and Taran's, but not quite.

"We will, but you have to do something first," Rei said and pointed through the door. Autumn saw Sora and Taran walk in.

Autumn walked out of the kitchen. "Hello, boys what can I get you? Espresso and tea?" she asked.

"Make it a triple," Taran answered and scrubbed a hand through his hair.

"Tea is fine," Sora stated.

"Coming right up," Autumn said and went over to her brother and hit his arm. "Get Sora a tea," she told him. She smiled benignly when the blond across the counter gave her a cold stare.

"Coming right up," Winter said, "Excuse me, Jacie," he said and was actually grateful for the opportunity to extract himself from the conversation. He made Sora's tea while Autumn made Taran's espresso.

He handed over the cool beverage. "Haven't seen you lately," he said conversationally.

"I was a bit peaky," Sora answered trying not to snap. He nursed his tea broodingly.

Win took the hint that he wasn't in the mood to talk. He noticed Jacie smiling at him. He tried again with Sora. "Nothing serious I hope," he said.

"Wish I could say it wasn't," Sora answered. Again he gave every indication that he wasn't interested in talking.

Jacie gave no indication of leaving. Win nearly deflated with relief when someone else walked into the Youth Center. Autumn was thankfully engrossed with talking to Taran so he readily went to the customer. "Hi there, what can I get you?" he asked, thinking there was something familiar about the dark haired Latino in a strange uniform. Then it clicked when he saw the badge and G.P.D. logo. Manny had said her uncle was a Galactic Policeman and was in town. She'd also pointed out that he was a former Power Ranger.

Carlos Valluertes smiled. "I called in an order for a coffee and a lunch under the name Carlos," he answered.

"That should be ready now," Win said. He moved into the kitchen to pick it up. When he brought the Styrofoam container and tall coffee to the man, he noticed that Sora had finished his tea and was gone. "Autumn! Handle this," he called to his sister and grabbed the cup.

Autumn quickly came to take over the confused Carlos' order with a smile. Win ran into the back and found an empty place to teleport to the Command Center. They finally had a sample of Sora's DNA. Now they could find out why he wanted to talk to the Power Rangers.

Taran watched the Bakers dash around. It made him smile. He noticed the blonde girl Win had been chatting up leave in a huff. Something about her made him frown. When Autumn finished with the other customer, she wandered back toward him. "Do you read everyone or just sometimes?" he asked her.

"I've finally gotten better at controlling it. I don't read people automatically anymore. Why?" she asked.

Taran shook his head. "My spidey senses were tingling," he answered.

Autumn frowned. "Why did you say it like that?" she asked.

Taran shifted slightly. "The Reavers started saying that. Guess I kinda picked it up as well," he said and picked up his espresso and forced himself not to chug.

She sighed. "Ok, be honest. I may have heard that you, um, aren't human," she said, not sure how to phrase the question.

"You heard correctly," Taran said and heaved another sigh. The not-human thing was probably quite a deal breaker.

Autumn smiled at him and blinked her eyes. When someone was that shiny, human or no, he had to be amazing. She blinked her eyes again. "So, tell me more," she prompted.

Taran seemed surprised she wanted to know. "All right. You already know Widow is my sister might as well tell it all. Our parents are Goldarr and Scorpina, they used to work for Rita Repulsa and Lord Zedd. When Andros shattered Zordon's inter-dimensional chamber, I was training on a nearby planet with an old friend of my father's. I was caught in the wave of pure Good that altered the polarities of many of the galaxy's worst villains. My parents and Widow were on Onyx and not affected.

"My polarity was altered along with everyone else's. When my parents found out, they sent me to Earth to live among humans. I was very small and to be honest I don't even remember being evil," he assured her.

"Are you sure you were evil? Are people born evil or do they choose to be evil?" she asked. "You were a child. Are children evil?" she asked.

He smiled. "No," he agreed. "But I didn't have it in me anymore to grow into an evil force," he said.

"Instead you grew into a force for good," she smiled again. She couldn't help it. He just made her smile. He smiled back and ducked his head to his espresso.

"Yeah well, you ain't seen my alien bits yet," he murmured.

"Can't wait," she said and went to help another customer, leaving him staring after her.

-x-

Tai was in the middle of his third class when his wrists began to vibrate. He frowned and rubbed them. Rex in the desk across from him raised a brow. Tai shook his head. He raised his hand and asked to be excused.

His science teacher, Dr.. Thomas Oliver raised a brow at him. "Is this an emergency?" he asked in a pointed way.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

Tommy nodded and held up a hall pass. Tai stood and snatched it. He left the classroom.

"Dry. O, I have an emergency, too," Rex piped up.

Tommy sighed and held up another hall pass. Grinning Rex stood and took it. He ran out the door and caught up with Tai. They ducked into the boys room and made sure no one was there. Rex gave him a thumbs up.

Tai twisted his wrists and his cuffs appeared. He opened communications. "I was buzzed," he said.

"Tai, Dr. Bill has Sora's DNA programmed into the Command Center. Whenever you're ready we can bring him here to talk to him," Win told him.

"Rex and I will be there after our last class," he said. Since they were seniors, they only had a few

credits left so they only had four classes each. "Tell Beez to keep an eye on him," he instructed.

"Right. You guys can handle it? Do you want me to stick around?" Win asked.

"We're not trying to scare him. Go on back to the Youth Center," Tai assured him.

"Will do. Good luck," Win said and cut communication.

Tai made his cuffs disappear. He looked at Rex. "Why do you think he's after the Power Rangers anyway?" he asked.

Rex shrugged. "We'd better get back. Dr. O looked annoyed for a guy who's been here," he said. Tai snorted. They left the bathroom just as the bell rang for fourth period. Kids began spilling out of classrooms. Tai and Rex waded through them. Tai was nearly crushed by a linebacker after Lani passed him with a smile and a wave that left him stupefied and rooted to the spot. Rex pulled him away just in the nick of time, muttering under his breath.

-x-

Tai and Rex arrived at the Command Center a while later. Tai was mildly surprised to see Billie wander through with coffee. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Danny and I are making good time. Don't bother us unless there's an emergency," she told them and hurried off. She disappeared into the bowels of the building.

"Do I even want to know?" Tai asked out loud. Rex shook his head emphatically.

"They are building me a new body," Beez said and sounded about as excited as a robot with rudimentary emotions could.

"Uh, great. What about Sora?" Tai asked.

"He's alone in his apartment," Beez announced.

"Good," Tai said. "When we've morphed, teleport him," he said and he and Rex walked to the room where they'd meet with Sora. They twisted their wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus!"

"Mastodon!"

-x-

Sora was pacing his apartment. He couldn't even concentrate on the work he had to make-up after being catatonic for two days. It'd been nearly two hours since he'd gone to the Youth Center and had a drink as he'd been instructed.

He was midstep when a flash of energy blinded him. He blinked and saw that he was no longer in his apartment. He was in a gray room and two Power Rangers stood before him. He sagged in relief. "I was

beginnin' t'think y'werena goin' ta talk wi' me," he said thickly.

"Whoa, step back and repeat that. I missed almost all of that," the male Black Ranger said.

"He said he was beginning to think we weren't going to talk with him," the male Red Ranger said.

"Excuse me for not having an Irish grandfather," his friend shot back.

Sora cleared his throat, reminding him that he was there. He was a bit surprised he'd slipped up with such a thick accent. "If I can interrupt," he said.

"Right, you wanted to talk to us. Why?" Red asked.

"I came to join you," Sora said. He pulled a chain from around his neck. Two things hung off of it, a miniature sword and a silver coin. "I've been on KO-35 since my mum passed living with a cousin. I already knew some kung fu, but when I got there I learned the Kovarian style of martial arts under my sensei, Zhane. He sent me back all of sudden and said for me use this and join you," he said and held up the coin. A dinosaur was embossed on it.

Red was surprised. "Then why haven't you used it before?" he asked.

"I haven't been able to. I--"

An alarm went off. "Aye yi yi! There are Putties near the Youth Center!" Beez announced.

"Use it now and let's go," Red said. "Beez deactivate the containment field." Autumn saw something in Sora that none of the rest of them could. His own instincts were backing her up. Black nodded his agreement. "And don't contact anyone in school," he instructed. "Not unless a monster shows up," he added.

Sora was mildly surprised that they'd had him an containment field. Though, it made sense. They were also giving him a chance. Rei had said to embrace his destiny. He took the coin off the chain and it dissolved into his arms and silver energy formed silver cuffs around his wrist. He could do this.

"It's Morphin' Time! Ceratosaurus!" Silvery energy formed a silver powersuit in the same style as the rest of the team and helmet with red eyes. He had a power blaster on his hip.

"Welcome to the team," Black said.

"Let's go!" Red said the three of them teleported.

-x-

A scream pierced the air. Putties appeared on the streets outside of the Youth Center, circling and tormenting a very helpless Jacie. "Someone help!" she shouted. The Putties began to harass other people but they kept circling and teasing Jacie.

The Green Rangers appeared. From around the back of the Youth Center but hopefully no one noticed that. "Hey, you Putties leave those people alone!" female Green commanded. "Power Staff!" She summoned her weapon and dove into the swarm.

"Stygian Dagger!" her partner summoned his own weapon. He jumped into it with both feet. Literally. He hit a Putty right in the Z and landed in a roll as it disintegrated. He slashed a few in the legs. When they'd fall he'd hit their Z's. He stood and took out a few more.

"I almost hate to get in the way of that. I'll have to insist though. StegoMace!" Gold Ranger summoned his Mace and powered his way through the Putties.

"I'm not complaining," female Green assured him. "He's showing off," she said, nodding toward her brother who'd almost made his way to the girl.

"Get away!" Gold suddenly shouted. "Trap!"

Several things happened at once. The male Green Ranger paused. The Silver Ranger, male Black Ranger, male Red Ranger and the Blue Rangers appeared. Zita arrived. Jacie gave several screams for good measure.

"What?!" Zita seethed when she saw the Silver Ranger. "Not while I'm around, pal," she said and made the shadow coin appear.

The male Green Ranger's indecision put him in danger from an ambushing Putty. "CeratoSword!" A rather large double-edged sword appeared in the Silver Ranger's hand and cut down the Putty.

"Thanks," Green Ranger said. He made a split second decision next. Until he had definitive proof that Jacie was part of some plot, he had to save her. It was only right.

Zita strode toward them. The Putties were thinning out, so the Rangers noticed her.

"You saved me!" Jacie declared and threw herself around the male Green Ranger's neck. He tried to extricate himself.

"Sora! Don't think you can get away from me so easily!" she said and held up her coin. Dark energy began to throb around it.

Silver clutched his head and staggered. His Morphed form began to fluctuate between Silver Ranger and Skeleton Ranger.

"I think we know why he never got the chance to use his coin," Black declared as he and Red closed in on him. They didn't know if it was to protect or defend but they were ready for anything.

There was a blur of white as another figure ran into the fray. She launched herself as Zita and tackled her. The coin went flying.

Gold Ranger rushed forward and jumped, catching it.

Silver Ranger stopped fluctuating but he was dizzy. "Rei?" he said when he recognized the figure grappling with Zita.

"You! You've interfered for the last time!" Zita shrieked and the two women lost all finesse and began to scratch and pull hair.

"Call me a pig but that's kinda hot," the male Blue Ranger remarked.

"Pig," the female Blue Ranger said and nailed his helmet with a rock. He rubbed it as if it actually hurt.

Gold Ranger was looking at the coin curiously. It seemed to be a Power Coin but it wasn't a dinosaur embossed on it.

"A little help!" the male Green Ranger said since Jacie had latched onto him and wasn't letting go.

"Forget her for now! The coin!" Gold called to Rei.

She broke away from Zita and ran toward him. "Toss it!" she called. Gold tossed it up.

Rei launched a white energy ball at it. "Nooo!" Zita screamed when the energy hit the coin. The force of the hit knocked everyone off their feet.

The coin dropped to the ground, a harmless mass of melted metal.

Zita growled as she got to her feet. "Don't think you've won anything! I may have lost Sora, but now I have him," she said and pointed.

Jacie still had her arms around the male Green Ranger.

"Next time, listen when you're given a warning," she said and began laughing. "Minxinia. Bring him!" she called. She disappeared in a wisp of dark smoke.

"Win!" the female Green Ranger tried to go to him, but he and Jacie were already being enveloped in multi-colored energy. They disappeared.

"Oh, Autumn, I'm so sorry," Rei gasped.

Gold moved up behind Green and put his hands on her shoulders. She sagged against him. She shook her head, not even sure how to react.

Rei suddenly found herself under the scrutiny of the Red, Black and Blue Rangers. She gave a wan smile and a tiny finger wave.

"Ok right, to the Youth Center. Looks it's a day for explanations," Red said and crooked a finger at Rei. Rei obediently followed them into the alley behind the Youth Center where they they dropped their Morphs and went up to the apartment area above the Center where the Bakers lived.

-X-

## Palace on the Moon

The male Green Ranger finally passed out due to oxygen deprivation and his morph had failed. Widow frowned as he hung limply at Minxinia's side. "Why did you bring him here?" she asked her sister-in-law.

Zita made a face. "I was peeved. I made a rash decision," she admitted, as if disgusted with herself.

Widow grabbed his face and turned his head this way and that. "He's one of the strongest. Perhaps he'd be useful for some experiments I wanted to do. Bring him to the lab," she ordered the monster.

As Widow lead the monster and unconscious Ranger away, Roki came up behind his sister. "What is going on?" he asked in an undertone.

Zita pursed her lips. "Perhaps the only way to know for sure is to ask Mother. Is that something you're willing to do?" she asked him and raised her brows.

He pulled a face. "She looks like you. I'll leave it to you," he said smartly, "Please do keep us informed, however," he added and trailed off to find his wife, curious as to what kind of experiments she was going to do on the Green Ranger.

Zita huffed and stamped her foot. "Finster!" she shrieked. "I have a headache! Bring me my tonic!" she screeched and flounced off to her room.

-X-

After school, Tai called a meeting in the Command Center to fill everyone in on the events of the day. It seemed as though much happened in a short period of time. Autumn was certainly upset and had to make up a story for her family to explain Winter's absence. She just didn't know what it would be.

Sora found himself surprisingly welcomed by the team, especially Taran. However, Rei's presence in the Command Center had been something of a surprise. "She's here to help," was Tai's only remark on he subject. That was enough for them.

"I'll do everything I can to help you get Winter back," she promised them.

Eventually the Command Center emptied out save for the Blues who were working on their Beez project. Tai had lingered after telling Lani about Rei. She had to leave for family obligations.

He was reading through some history in the data banks when a large hand clapped him on his back. He jumped slightly and looked down at Jason. "How did you get that close to me?" he asked. People just didn't sneak up on him. Period.

Jason grinned. "Heard you kids had an interesting day," he said.



"That's a mild way of putting it," Tai said flatly.

The older man nodded. "These things happen. They're hard and they suck. You'll get through it," he said.

"You sound so sure. Why is that?" Tai said. He wasn't so sure, personally.

"Because you have a great team and you're you," Jason answered.

Tai stared at him. Before he could ask what exactly that was supposed to mean, Jason's phone rang and he was called away to an emergency at the dojo. Or what Randi deemed an emergency.

Tai checked the time. He sighed. He went to where the Blues were working and made them go home and forbid them from skipping school again. Billie grumbled and muttered. Danny held up his hands and assured their fearless leader that he'd keep her in check. After making certain they left, Tai himself went home as well.

-x-

After school the next day, Nathan, Wood, Danny and Billie walked toward the Youth Center together. "Luckily nothing monumental happened today while we were in prison," Nathan remarked to his friends.

"Except we lost a whole day of work," Billie seethed. "Where does he get off--"

"Ah, zip it," Danny said and covered her mouth with his hand. "You gonna tell me you don't feel better after resting? That Tai, he's an onion," Danny remarked. She glared at him over his hand.

"An onion?" Nathan asked.

"He's got layers," Wood explained with a smile. He was surprised by the smile. He'd been moping most of the day. Well, he'd been moping since he learned Winter had been taken by a monster. Man, if only he could get his hands on that-that--

"Anyways, we're gonna go get to work now anyways. Onna yous bring her some caffeine?" Danny asked, interrupting Wood from his thoughts.

"Sure thing. Some food, too. She didn't eat lunch," Nathan said and gave Billie a disapproving look. She ignored it and the two Blues found a private place to teleport.

"Maybe we should go to the Command Center, too. Try and see if we can figure out a plan--"

Nathan shook his head. "We just gotta wait and see. You heard what Rei was saying about the Moon. The Palace is heavily warded. There's no getting in for any of us," he said.

Wood stuffed his hands in his pockets and deflated. He hoped Tori was at the Youth Center. Seeing her always made him feel better. Just thinking about her reinflated him a little.

"You've got to be kidding me. Do you see what I see?" Nathan asked suddenly. Wood looked up. Walking down the street toward them was a tall blond girl with gaudy red glasses. Contrary to what Superman would have one believe, glasses were not an apt disguise to hide one's identity.

Jacie had been dismissed from Widow's presence on the moon and had been collecting pretty boys ever since. She kept them in a cave, frozen to preserve their prettiness. She spotted two likely candidates. She'd made a pair of glasses appear. One of them liked glasses. She put on her best smile and moved toward them.

Wood made his cuffs appear. "Hey, we've spotted the monster. In fact she's walking right up to us," he said into his communicator.

"We're on our way," Tai said.

Jacie gave them a winning smile. She had no idea who they were. Not really. Just vaguely did she pay any attention to the instructions she'd been given before, but now no one was paying attention to her so she could do whatever she wanted. She wanted a pretty boy army. "Hi, there," she greeted.

Nathan raised a brow. "Yeah, um..."

"Where's Winter, you big ugly hag?" Wood burst out.

"Ugly? Hag?" Jacie shrieked. "Who do you think you're talking to? Just for that I'll crush you instead of keeping you," she said and began to change forms.

"Good luck with that," Nathan said and made his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' time! Pterodactyl!!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

Minxinia recoiled as her two pretty boys morphed. "Putties!" she summoned. A contingent of Putty Patrollers appeared around her and began attacking Yellow and Pink.

"Don't think this is going to stop us getting you back!" Yellow told her. "Power Daggers!" he summoned his weapons and jumped over the line of Putties to the monster. He slashed her but she knocked him back. He stumbled and tried to get to his feet. The Orbs in her forehead began to glow and through a whirling vortex of energy at him.

Another streak of Yellow pushed him out of the way. He and the female Yellow glanced at the crater left where he'd been standing. "That was a close one," she said.

"I owe you. Nice speed," he said.

She nodded. "I think I can get used to it," she declared, a grin in her voice.

The other Rangers had arrived to help. They dove into the Putties. In the center of the fray, the monster threw arcs of dark energy, mindless of what they hit; Ranger or Putty.

"She's cracked!" the male Pink Ranger declared as he dove aside when one of blasts hit the Putties he was battling.

"We need to take her out before she destroys half the city in a snit," the male Red declared when he came upon the scene.

"Not before she tells us where Winter is!" the female Green declared.

"Hey, you two," the male Red pointed at Gold and Silver, "grab her," he said, taking a calculated risk. The Silver Ranger was using a sword that was every bit as huge as the one he'd had as he Skeleton Ranger. That said he was no weakling.

Filling the need to prove himself to these guys, Silver nodded. He glanced at Gold. He made a hand signal Silver was surprised he knew. It was Kovarian. It meant 'go'. The two of them took off running at speeds nearly matching the female Yellow's enhanced speed and each other's.

They took down the monster, pinning each shoulder but she was a tough one and fought back hard. "Dang, she's strong," Gold muttered under his breath.

"That she is," Silver agreed thickly.

The male Red pointed his Sword in her face, he planted a foot in her chest to help hold her down.. "What did you do with Winter?" he asked.

She laughed mockingly at him. "Widow has him now. You might as well kiss him good-bye!" she declared. Her orbs began to glow.

"Move!" Gold shouted, spidey senses suddenly in overdrive. The three of them tried to scatter back but they got caught in the shockwave she created, sending them flying. Silver crashed through a shop window and didn't stop until he hit a metal shelf bracketed to a concrete wall. Gold arced through the air and crashed through an open-manhole. Red took out several Putties as he bumped and rolled and skidded back.

Minxinia laughed again as she got to her bird feet.

The female Red Ranger and male Black Ranger went to check on the male Red Ranger. "Did you survive that?" Black asked him.

Red got to his feet and shook himself. "She's ticking me off," he declared.

"Same here," Gold said, climbing out of the man-hole. He summoned his StegoMace.

Silver dusted himself off as he exited the shop he demolished. "I have the uneasy feeling that's not the first time I've done that," he said, looking over his shoulder.

"It's not," the male Blue stated, a grin in his voice. "We won't hold this one against ya, though," he assured. Silver nodded. He drew his huge honking CeratoSword.

"I am suddenly very sympathetic to this monster. I think she ticked off the wrong three guys," the female Yellow said in a low voice to her partner.

He nodded as he watched the three of them converge once again. He didn't feel any sympathy but he had to agree she ticked off the wrong trio.

"First us, then you two. Got it?" the male Red asked the shiny Rangers. They nodded. "Mega Power Cannon!" Six Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon.

The male Red Ranger aimed the Cannon. "Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger. Six points of energy swirled and swept through her. Gold Ranger's StegoMace glowed with golden light as he sped forward and cracked it across her head. Silver Ranger's CeratoSword glowed brightly as sped forward and slashed his sword through her.

They stood with their backs to her as she exploded in a howl of disgust. She regrouped and grew enormously huge. She tittered. "Poo poo, you lose. Losers!" she mocked. "Now I really add to my collection," she said in a sing-song way.

"There's only one thing to do now. TyrannoZord!" the male Red summoned.

"TriceraZord!"

"MastoZord!"

"PteraZord!"

"SaberZord!"

"StygiZord!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The male Red, male Blue, female Black, male Pink, male Yellow and female Green.

"Do you have a Zord?" Gold asked Silver.

"Fraid not," Silver said.

"Patience," Beta Z admonished them over their helmet-comms. They shrugged and helped the grounded Rangers clear out the remaining Putty Patrollers.

"Activating Megazord configuration," the male Red hit a rather large button in his cockpit. The Zords began assembling together. The SaberZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord came apart and formed a larger helmet, a body shield and a long sword.

The Rangers appeared in a large cockpit.

Minxinia threw arcs of energy that rocked them.

"Can we please just end ger now?" female Green asked. She'd had about as much of this monster as she could take. Red nodded.

"Alpha Megazord! Horned Spin Sword Strike!" The Sword formed from the StygiZord began spinning and glowing. The Megazord sped forward rammed the Sword into the monster's forehead.

An explosion rocked between them but she was still lingering. "I thought we had her for sure," Yellow declared.

"Hang on," Blue said as he was doing something computery at his console. "A'ight, I think I got something, but we can only do it once and it's gonna fry every circuit we have," he warned them.

"It's a chance we have to take," Red said as he defended them from an energy blast. "Say when."

Blue nodded. He took off the cover of his console and ripped out a big plug of wires. He quickly began rerouting them. He cursed when a lucky hit short sparks and nearly scorched his hands even through his power suit. "A'ight, now!" he said as he wrapped the last two wires around each other.

"Horned Spin Sword Strike!" The StygiSword began spinning and glowing again. Power surged through the cockpit and every console sparked with power as it was all rerouted to the Sword. The Megazord plunged the Sword into the monster's forehead again.

She and the orbs exploded and so did the inside of the cockpit. "Second use and we've destroyed our Zords. This must be some kind of record," the male Pink said dryly.

"Nah, they're just shorted out. Whoever designed them needs to address a serious power problem though," Blue commented.

"Looks like the Putties have been sorted out, too. Time to go," Black said, pointing to where the others were cheering up at them.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Roki grunted in frustration as he saw his monster fail again. "Why does Finster make stupid monsters?" he muttered. He kicked the telescope and went to the lab where his wife was working diligently. Vivexia was lounging on a bed nearby. The twins were in a corner playing with tiny Red Ranger voo-doo dolls. He realized he hadn't seen his sister since she brought them the male Green Ranger. For a moment he was concerned. It quickly dissipated.

Widow glanced up at him. "Do you need tonic, husband?" she asked as she loaded a rather large syringe with bright green fluid.

"I'll be fine," he said. He turned a glare on Vivexia. She raised a brow. "You will no fail as your sisters have done, will you?" he asked.

"Fear not, my lord. My plan is far more insidious than either of them could have thought of. When the time is right, I will strike," she said with a smile.

"You know what happens if you fail," he said. He didn't bother to threaten. She failed, the Power Rangers blew her up. End of story.

"Yes, my lord," she agreed demurely.

"Then why don't you go work on that plan?" Widow said, shooing her away. She approached a bed where Winter was strapped in and unconscious.

"As you wish, my lady," Vivexia with a pout. She hopped off the bed and disappeared.

"Whatever are you doing, my dear?" Roki asked, wincing slightly as she injected the man with the green fluid. He moaned in pain.

"While my parents are here, I'm not allowed to engage Tarantules directly. I'm making Mr. Nice Guy here a little meaner," she said with a smirk. "I'm injecting him with Rachnaemane DNA with a bridging agent. I have to even the playing field a bit. Tarantules won't know what hit him," she said with an evil grin.

Roki shared her smile.

-x-

Tai caught Taran and Sora not far from the Youth Center. He called out to them. They paused while he approached. He nodded to Taran and looked at Sora. "I just want you to know that no one's holding the Skeleton Ranger thing against you. They might rag on you a bit, but we all understand. You proved yourself ten times over today," he said.

Sora nodded, trying not to smile. Sheesh, this tall skinny kid was making him feel like a pupil again. "I appreciate that. I can take some ragging," he said with a faint smile.

Tai nodded. "Just thought I'd let you know. I gotta jet. I gotta grouchy old Japanese man waiting for me at home," he said with a sigh and gave them a brief salute as he disappeared down an ally.

Sora glanced at Taran who was having trouble holding in a grin. "Why do feel like I was just given a gold star on a test?" he asked.

"Because you were," Taran said with a chuckle.

"Sora!" Rei came dashing toward them. He couldn't stop a smile. She smiled back. "Excuse us, Taran. We have some things to discuss," she said and grabbed Sora's arm and pulled him away.

"I'll bet ya'll do," Taran chuckled as the two of them walked the way Sora had come. He sighed and walked into the Youth Center. It was so strange not to see Winter there. Autumn wasn't behind the counter. She was sitting in a far booth nursing a hot chocolate. He made his way over to her and sat down across from her.

She glanced up at him. "Hi," she greeted.

"Hi," he returned. He was quiet a moment. "We'll get Winter back even if I have to figure out a way to storm the palace," he said finally.

She couldn't hold in the smile those serious words brought forth. She reached out and took his hand. He squeezed hers. He meant it.

-x-

Danny and Billie were working on various parts of Beta Z's anatomy in their lab at the Command Center. They were so engrossed in their work and used to tuning out Nathan or Wood coming along to try and coax them into taking a break, they weren't aware they weren't alone until someone spoke.

"Which one of you blew up my Zords?" Wearing a billed cap with the Nodroz Corp logo on it, grayish blue cover all, hair in a pony tail and cheeks streaked with grease, Holly Fairweather demanded of the only two people capable of doing what had been done to her Zords. She fisted her hands on her hips waiting for an answer as they gaped at her.

-xEnd Chapter 07x-

## 8 - High Noon

### Palace on the Moon

There was an explosion in the library. Everyone dropped everything and rushed to investigate. It was almost impossible that enemies were intruding. Zita and Widow reached the entrance first. They yelped and found something to hang on to. An inter-dimensional portal had formed in the library and was sucking everything it could into the swirling void. Roki grabbed their hands as Rito, Goldarr and Scorpina steadied him.

"Can you close it?" Roki shouted at them over the ominous inhaling noise it was making.

"Keep hold of our hands! I'll need both of your energies!" Widow shouted in answer. Zita nodded. Widow drew in a deep breath and drew on her reservoir of power. She shouted an arcane spell and flung a burst of light at the vortex. It disappeared with an air sucking pop, making all their ears pop. A book fell to the ground where it had been.

Widow regained her composure and hurried to pick up the book. She thumbed through it and sure enough, there was a spell to open an inter-dimensional vortex. It was a complicated spell to exert control over the vortex. Whoever opened the portal had no control over when or where they were going to end up.

"Where are the children? They were playing here earlier," Scorpina gasped.

Widow looked down at the book. Of the two, Lammy was already beginning to exhibit a skill for magick. "I'm, sorry Mother," Widow said, setting the book aside. "Lammy opened the portal," she said and had to witness her strong warrior-mother collapse into her father's arms, sobbing. He patted her on the back and took her away from the scene.

Rito shook his head sympathetically and followed them trying to reassure her but only making her sob more. Zita sighed. "I'm sorry," she said quietly toward Widow.

Widow nodded. "They're strong. Perhaps one day they'll even make their way home," she said. She moved toward Roki. He enveloped her in his arms and kissed the top of her head. They walked away from the library.

Zita scratched her chin. She took the book and scanned through it herself. Not exactly sure what compelled her, she performed a spell. She set the book aside and walked out of the library. A monster attack would probably distract them all and throw the Rangers off their game. She'd see to it immediately.

-X-

The Rangers were indeed confused when the next couple of monsters to attack were not the ones



powered by Reaver Orbs as they expected.

Word had also reached Taran about what had happened to his younger siblings. He'd never even seen them but he still felt sorrow for what happened to them. It was a sad thing. Secretly he hoped it would be all the better for them to grow outside the influence of his parents. Rei's similar sentiments had been expressed openly.

The Rangers, however, were no closer to knowing what was happening to Winter. Autumn was a basket-case trying to cover for him and worry for him all at once. Her one bright spot was the arrival of cousin Fox Oliver, who finally convince his globe-trotting parents to send to live in America with his cousins instead of sticking him in a boarding school again. He was such a huge help. Especially now that it was competition season.

The Youth Center had been transformed into a samurai battleground. Actually, they were hosting qualifiers for sectional Youth Kendo Championships. The top athletes in several age brackets would be qualify to compete in sectionals taking place in Stone Canyon later that year. Tai was competing in the highest age bracket. His last year to compete in the Youth Championships. He was determined to go out on a win. He'd won nationals the last three years. When he was fifteen, he'd barely lost. He was determined not to lose again.

Qualifiers was an important step, especially for newcomers to the sport, were home-schooled, attended smaller schools outside the cities or represented a dojo. As long as you were of an age, you could compete. Lani was in the audience, watching. She'd become a huge fan of the sport since arriving in Angel Grove. Her partner was part of the reason why.

Rex plopped into a seat next to her, making her jump. He grinned. "What?" he asked innocently.

She sighed. She kind of wished he hadn't spotted her but she wasn't surprised he was here. "Supporting your boyfriend?" she asked.

"Jealous?" he asked. She huffed and refused to answer as she watched the current match, silently stewing.

She wrinkled her nose. That girl was competing. The one who transferred a few weeks ago and insisted on talking Tai's ears off about Keno and was *all* over him. Ami something or other. "Who is that anyway?" she asked him.

Rex chuckled. "I figured she was a Kendo groupie, but she's pretty good. Bugs the hell out of Tai though. I mean, he's never been that good around girls, but I've never seen him avidly avoid them either," he said.

Lani perked up a little. "Oh?" she said as innocuously as possible.

Rex didn't buy it. He laughed. He watched the girl win the match but didn't satisfy her curiosity. "You wanna know something, ask him yourself," he said and poked her arm.

She huffed again and pouted. Yeah, it was that easy. She dropped it as they watched the remaining

matches. Tai's match was the last match. She sat forward slightly but pretended she was bending down to fix her shoelace when she caught Rex grinning at her. She sat back and he laughed again. She ignored him and watched the match. Dressed in pristine white kimono and sharp grey hakama he reminded her of a bishounen manga hero. His expression was serious as he gripped his shinai.

His match was kind of a let down. They'd paired him against some kid who barely knew how to hold the weapon. Tai shook his head and got his three points in due haste. There was no need to drag it out.

"Well that sucked," Rex said.

Lani nodded.

The ref announced Tai winner and stated that the qualifying competitors would be announced soon. Rex stood. He dragged Lani up. She wanted to go to Tai of course, but then he'd wonder why she was there and that would be so embarrassing. She resisted until she saw that girl hug Tai. And then kiss him!

Her feet were moving before she could stop herself. Rex trailed behind her with an amused expression on his face. Was this going to be the catalyst?

Tai was valiantly trying to extricate himself from the girl's attentions but she was like a leech. She was clamped on and she wasn't letting go.

"Excuse me," Lani said in a loud clipped tone.

Ami finally released Tai and turned toward Lani. "Can't you see we're in the middle of something?" she asked in a huff.

"No, we weren't," Tai quickly stated, mortified that Lani had seen that. "Wh-what are you doing here?" he asked sheepishly and moved, putting Rex between him and the two girls. Rex handled girls a lot better than he did.

"Watching the match. You were jipped of a decent opponent," Rex said, seeing that Lani and Ami were still eye-balling each other. They were the same height and about the same body-type. Hmm, weirdly, Ami actually looked a great deal like Lani. He wasn't an alien but his own spidy senses were tingling. "Why don't the three of us grab a shake while they tally points and what-not," he suggested, reaching out to pull Lani away from Ami.

Lani gave Ami a final glare, ignored Tai completely and flounced from that part of the Youth Center to the restaurant part. Tai sighed, grabbed his things and quickly followed with Rex.

Ami smirked as they left. It was already too late. She licked her lips. Tai wasn't going to last long now that she had a taste of him. "And all without a big ruckus," she murmured to herself and walked out of the Youth Center and disappeared.

-x-

"Yo, waiter! Where's the fries!" Danny called out to the lean young man by the counter. Fox Oliver

glanced at the booth where he sat. He was sitting with Billie and Holly. Ever since she stormed into their lab demanding to know which one of them had shorted out the Zords, she'd become one of them and was a regular face around the Command Center. Lani and Manny were pleased as punch to have their friend in on their secret and to know hers.

Fox was the new guy in town and despite good-natured ribbing from the locals, rather liked it here. "Ask the twin dynamos. They're manning the kitchens. Got a problem, take it up with them," he answered, pointing toward the kitchen behind him. One of the twins appears, made a face at him. "Here are the messy fries," she said.

Danny grinned as Fox delivered the fries with flourish.

"Good man," Danny said. "Pull up a seat, you look beat," he invited.

Fox raised a brow and waited for either of the girls to say anything, but neither did. The cute red-head was staring off in space and the blonde was engrossed in her computer. They both reached out for fries without paying attention to him or Danny. "As you can see, I'm starved for conversation," Danny commented.

Fox shrugged and sat down. He could chill for a few minutes. "Er..what--"

"Don't ask what we're doing. We wouldn't want your head to explode," Billie muttered. Holly blinked and looked as if she just noticed him. She gave him an absent smile.

"I get the feeling she didn't even mean that as an insult," Fox said dryly.

Danny grinned. "She didn't," he said and chuckled. "How's tricks? Angel Grove treating you good so fah?" he asked and stuffed a few fries into his mouth. He was starving. He'd pulled an all-nighter. Thank goodness it was a weekend.

"So far so good," Fox answered.

There was a commotion as people from the Kendo competition began to filter into the restaurant. "So much for a break," he complained as he got to his feet.

"Later," Danny said. Fox nodded and skirted around Lani, Rex and Tai as they claimed a table next to them. "How'd it go?" he asked curiously.

"They're figuring it out now," Rex answered and went to the bar to order for the three of them.

Tai sat down and leaned forward, suddenly feeling tired. He closed his eyes for a few moments and took a deep breath. It must have been nerves. He shook himself mentally, putting off the fatigue. "You weren't torturing Fox, were you?" he asked Danny.

"I was on my best behavior," Danny assured him. "It's that'n you need to talk to," he said, pointing a French fry at Billie.

"Did you want me to explain that I was creating a program to give an android the emotional range of a healthy, well adjusted human adult?" she asked him without looking up. "Or that Holly is stewing over the structural engineering problems involved in building Zords?"

"That would be a no," Tai agreed, a bemused expression on his face.

Lani jiggled her foot slightly. She'd noticed his pause but was still mad at him so she didn't ask if he was okay. Holly frowned at her slightly. Lani gave her the 'I'll tell you later' look.

"Are you going to compete next weekend?" Rex asked Danny as he brought Lani a strawberry-cheesecake shake, Tai a chai-tea and frozen hot chocolate for himself. "You've been busy," he pointed out.

"Yeah, but me an' Chloe been gettin' in some practice before school. We're going to give it shot," Danny asked.

"Does everyone in this bloody place do martial arts?" Fox asked. He'd been serving a table nearby and heard the last part of the conversation. Autumn was already in overdrive mode trying to decide how to set up for the Karate competition the following weekend. Fox reckoned Winter picked a bad time to leave town.

"Only the cool people," Rex answered.

"That must explain why you don't compete," Billie declared.

"Ouch. Way to cut deep, Glitch. I don't compete because I don't want to embarrass the other competitors with my awesome," he shot back.

"Right," Fox murmured and stepped away from them to take more orders.

"Anyway, I was thinking," Rex started.

"You didn't break anything did you?" Tai asked him.

Rex let him know what he thought of that cracked with an unfriendly hand gesture. "So, there are still four orbs outstanding. At least one more lady friend. I got to thinking, the way they look may be catered to specific taste profiles," he said.

"Like you mean, Win was into leggy blonds with, er...broad shoulders?" Danny asked. He grimaced. "I think you're right," he said simply. He didn't want to discuss the first monster that turned herself into a cute redhead with light eyes.

"So...what does that tell us about our lady friends?" Lani asked.

"It means who do we know with some weird chick hanging around that happens to be just his type?" Rex answered. Everyone knew the answer immediately.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. Crap. That was his last thought before he slumped over and fell out of his chair, the world going black around him. He was unaware of the commotion he caused as his friends tried to discover what happened to him.

-X-

Taran had gone to check on the Reavers with Tori and Wood tagging along. Tori because she was just as concerned about them as he was. Wood was with them for several reasons. He enjoyed getting to know Fey, he was rudderless because Danny and Billie were building Beez and Nathan was in secret extreme gymnastics training, and hanging out with Tori was always a good reason to do anything.

They discovered the Reavers at each other's throats. The twins, usually the most laid back of the bunch, were nearly coming to blows over a missing energy bar. Yelena, Ros and Shen were arguing about which of them takes too long in the bathroom. Ted was 63+ in his room blaring music at it's loudest trying to drown out the racket, but only making things worse. Hayden and Fey were valiantly trying to reason with all of them.

Taran knew it was stress, nerves, and anxiety making them a little stir crazy but that was no excuse for this. They kept this up they'd be kicked out of the hotel. Wood and Tori gaped. He felt embarrassed for them. He sighed and put two fingers in his mouth and whistled loud enough to be heard across a cornfield where his adoptive father was running his tractor. It was more than enough to get the Reavers' attentions. The arguments stopped, the music turned off and Ted looked out of his room.

When they spotted Taran, they at least had the good grace to look shame-faced.

"What would Memphis think of this?" Tori scolded them. That made them feel even worse. Memphis Teague was their Commander. He'd disappeared when Widow blew up the Command Ship. They began murmuring apologies to each other.

"That's it, grab some gear. We're going on a field trip," Taran declared.

"Field trip?" Hayden asked.

"Ya'll have too much energy. We're going to work some of it off. Now, people, move it!" he barked when they looked at him blankly.

Tori giggled. Wood was kind of amazed. Taran never tried to assume a leadership role as a Ranger; it was kind of awesome seeing him do it now.

As it turned out the field trip was to the Scott Dojo. Randi greeted them with a harried air. She blinked at the group, decided she so did not even want explanations. "With the tourney next weekend we're been swamped but we do have a room where there's only one other person. He won't mind you using it," she said. She led them to a training room where Rei was watching Sora train with a wide-eyed expression of bliss.

Sora, using a wooden sword, paused when they arrived.

"Don't mind the company do you, Sora? No, of course you don't," Randi said breezily before he could answer. "You can have this room for two hours," she said and left, thinking to herself that when her big brother showed his face again, she was going to fry it for running off and leaving her to deal with the traffic. He swore it was an emergency and that he'd be back soon. One thing was for sure, they needed someone else around here to help.

Rei giggled at Randi as she left. "What's up?" she asked.

"Taran's mad at the Reavers. He's fixing to make them do drills for two hours," Tori answered. That remark earned a unified groan.

"Everyone except Hayden and Fey. The rest of you, kick flips. Now!" Taran barked. They lined up and began performing the action as they were instructed.

Sora watched curiously.

"Don't think you two are spared," Taran said and smiled at Fey and Hayden.

"Never thought myself that lucky," Hayden said.

"You need to practice with a sword more. Sora, you looked like you could use a sparring partner. Interested?" he asked.

Sora smiled. "Sure. Is he any good?" he asked, eyeing Hayden.

Hayden shifted slightly under the gaze. The Reavers weren't privy to much Ranger business but they were aware that Sora had been the powerful Skeleton Ranger and that he wielded a large heavy blade as the Silver Ranger. "I'm a Bly, mate. We're not bad," he quipped.

Sora wasn't sure what that was supposed to mean. He picked up another boken and tossed it to Hayden. "Then let's go," he said. The two of them moved off to the side and Sora began putting Hayden through his paces.

Fey looked at Taran shrewdly. "You're preparing him to take your place," she said. Taran didn't bother to answer. There was no need. It wasn't a question.

"Oh! Oh! Can I spar with Fey?" Rei asked raising her hand. "I've been learning to use a long staff. That's your Reaver weapon, right?" she asked Fey excitedly.

Fey nodded. She looked at Taran, raising a brow. "Go for it," he said.

Rei beamed. Fey retrieved her training weapon and Rei made a staff appear out of thin air. The two of them moved off to spar.

Wood watched everything from the sidelines. "So much better than timing how many back flips Nath can do in a minute," he declared.

Taran glanced at the two of them. "Who says ya'll just get to sit around a watch?" he asked.

"What do you want us to do?" Tori asked.

"I want you to help me keep them in line," he said to Wood and tossed him a whistle. "Whatever you can think of, make them do it," he said.

Wood caught the whistle and ran over to the Reavers, and blew the whistle. They stopped and waited for further instructions.

"I'm going to work with Sora and Hayden. You go help Fey with Rei," he told Tori. She nodded and skipped off to observe the two women while Taran watched over the swordsmen.

The two hours was almost up when they got the message about Tai collapsing at the Youth Center.

-x-

Lani paced the newly refurbished medi-lab where Tai lay unconscious on a medi-bed. She chewed on her finger. He'd been there for two days and there was no sign of Ami or whatever monster she could become.

"Excuse me," a softly accented voice said behind her. She turned and saw a blond woman about the same age as the other elders. "I'm Kat. Beta Z asked me to check on him," she said as she entered the medi-lab.

Lani nodded blankly. "Why?" she asked.

"I'm a nurse. Or was before I packed up my life and carried it back to Angel Grove," the other woman answered. She began checking read-outs and adjusted the medi-bed. "Strange," she murmured.

"What is it?" Lani asked.

"If what I'm reading is correct, he's aged by about two years," Kat answered. "I'd better let Billy know," she said. She gave Lani a pat on the shoulder. "Don't worry, you'll find a way," she said.

Lani nodded. Kat left the medi-lab. She sighed. The sad part was that Tai had qualified for the sectional tournament with a top score. Come to that, so did Ami. An idea suddenly struck her. She left the medi-lab and went to the Power Chamber. "Contact Rei. I want her to get a message to her sister," she said to Beez.

"Right away," Beez said.

"What are you thinkin', li'l Red?" Jason asked her, startling her. The older Red seemed to be around at the oddest times.

"I'm thinking this monster has an ego. I'm going to use that to get her attention," Lani answered. "I'm challenging her to a duel."

-X-

## Palace on the Moon

Zita strolled into Widow's laboratory. "I got the strangest message from *that person*," she said. *That person* referred to Rei.

Widow was testing Winter's blood. He was almost ready for field testing against her brother. Vivexia was standing by a glowing ball. It was slowly filling up with fiery red energy she was channeling through the orbs in her forehead.

"What kind of message?" Widow asked, looking up from her microscope.

Zita cleared her throat. "It's for her," she said, pointing at the monster. Vivexia turned toward her curiously. "The Red Ranger challenged you to a duel. If you refuse to show your face at a set of coordinates at the allotted time, you shall forever proclaim yourself her inferior and a coward."

"What a cheap ploy. As if we would fall--" Widow's words were cut off by the Harphurie's indignant squawk.

"I'll teach that indignant little upstart who's inferior!" she vowed.

"You will not. You will remain here and drain the life from their leader," Widow said.

"The process can't be stopped. I will meet that weakling. When and where?" she demanded of Zita. "Never mind, I'll find her myself!" she disappeared in a puff of smoke and feathers.

Widow pursed her lips. "Roki is not going to like that," she said.

"Speaking of my dear brother, where is he?" Zita asked.

Widow smirked. "Playing with our pet," she said and drew a portal in the air. It shimmered to show an image of Roki and Winter in a training room trading blows. "I think he's happy to have someone other than Rito or Papa to spar with. I just hope he lasts long enough to defeat Tarantules. Sadly, the splicing is very unstable," she said, shaking her head. "One for the fail pile," she said with a pout. She waved her hand and the portal disbursed.

Zita nodded. She shifted slightly. "A shame," she said sympathetically. "At least we'll be rid of one of them," she said. Widow nodded but her she was already refocused on the blood sample. Zita left her to it.

-X-

Tai looked like a man in thirties by the time it came time for Lani to leave for her duel. She couldn't help but notice he was aging well. Then she felt stupid for thinking that. She left the medi-lab. She found her grim-faced teammates waiting for her. They would be here, standing by when she needed them.



"Are you certain you want to go alone?" Taran asked her.

She shook her head. "But I will," she said determinedly.

"I would say that you should take Billie with you, but she can't fight for beans," Chloe remarked and eyed her brother's best friend. Chloe had been spending most of the past couple days training herself. Usually alone, but sometimes Danny was able to spar.

Billie didn't look offended. She knew it was true that fighting was not her strong suit.

"No, but she is a crack shot and she has that nifty analyzing computer thing. How long can you stay invisible?" Rex asked her.

"Not that long," Billie answered. "But I haven't tested the limits of my invisible capabilities," she added.

"Something we should work on," Billy said. "It would be a good idea to monitor the abilities bonding with the Power Coins have given each of you," he said, and even jotted something down to remind himself of that.

"Then I'll go. She's not that interested in me, maybe she won't perceive me as threat," Chloe volunteered.

"Best not to risk it. If things start getting hinky, then the rest of you can teleport in and save my bacon. I'm going alone," Lani said. She smiled. "But thanks for the offer," she said.

"I wouldn't take it personal. She's pumped from training," Danny interrupted, earning him a punch in the arm.

"Ow, jeez, I need that arm, She-Hulk," Danny grumbled and rubbed it.

Lani snickered. "OK, I'm off, wish me luck," she said and teleported before anyone could actually wish her luck or before she caved and allowed Chloe to come along as back-up.

"We're not really going to let her go all alone, right?" Chloe asked. "We're not going to believe that monster isn't going to cheat her tail feathers off," she insisted.

"Calm down, partner. No one's hanging Lani out to dry," Rex assured her.

"Indeed not," Beez chimed in. She opened a case with six round chips.

"When Lani concocted her plan, we decided she would need back-up even though we knew she would insist on going alone," Holly explained. "Since we were on a time crunch we only were able to make these. They'll work with your Morphs for a limited time."

"They won't make you invisible, but they'll help you blend in if you stay still," Billie explained. "We need six volunteers," she said.

"Right here, fork one over," Chloe said and held out her hand.

"Me, too," Danny said. Several voices piped in as well.

"Hang on a minute. I know we all want to help, but chill out," Rex said loudly. "Chloe, Danny, Manny, Nathan, Autumn, Sora," he said, pointing to each of them in turn. "We good with that?" he asked.

"We're good," Wood agreed. Tori nodded her approval as well. Taran held up his hands in surrender.

Holly attached a chip to each of their hands. "It will activate when you Morph. To deactivate, tap the back of your hands. Don't do so prematurely. They only have one go in them," she warned.

"We got it," Chloe said. She stood back and twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Mastodon!"

"Triceratops!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Stygimoloch!"

-x-

Lani chose her location with care. Just as the landscape begins to turn to sand but still hard, nowhere near the city or the Command Center. She also picked a time of day when the sun wouldn't bother her vision. There was no cover for the monster. Or her. They were on even ground.

She stood still as she waited. She wasn't aware of reinforcements arriving to blend in. Apprehension crawled down her spine when Vivexia finally arrived. She did not come alone. Widow, Zita and Roki were standing around behind her. "Are you afraid to face me alone?" she asked.

Vivexia wore the guise of Ami dressed for a Kendo match.

"We're just here to watch," Widow assured her. She waved her arm. A Gothic patio set appeared with elaborate wrought iron chairs and table with a black lacy umbrella for shade. She changed herself into a beach outfit complete with wide black straw hat, oversized designer shades and sheer wrap over a bikini. She sat down in one of the chairs and made a fruity drink appear in her hands. "Do carry on," she prompted.

"This should be quite the show," Roki agreed and took a seat next to his wife. Zita thought the whole thing was a bad idea but she sat at the table as well. She conjured a drink of her own.

Lani was frankly flabbergasted at their behavior. She sniffed but squared her shoulders. "Power Sword!" she summoned the blade.

Vivexia produced a shinai that quickly warped itself into a rather sinister looking blade.

"Already an unexpected twist!" Widow said delightedly.

Deciding to ignore her audience, Lani stepped toward. Although she was not trained in Kendo, she'd had blades in her hands before she could even walk. She was reasonably sure she could hold her own against this monster, wear it down, anger it until it broke the rules, summoned Putty Patrollers and gave them all the excuse they needed fricassee her fowl self.

Vivexia scoffed. "Little Ranger Red thinks she can beat me. I'll show you!" She charged forward with her sword. Lani sprang forward to meet her. Their swords met, glancing off of each other in a shower of sparks.

-x-

Taran was instantly on guard when her sister and the Repulsa's arrived with the monster. Rei stiffened and narrowed her eyes. He reached out and put a hand on her arm. "Uh-uh," he shook his head. "If you or I go intruding it could tick them off. This isn't end game time. It's stop Tai from dieing time," he said quietly.

Rei nodded. She wasn't really going to go running out to antagonize her siblings. Not really. OK, maybe it crossed her mind. Briefly.

All right. She wanted to go demand what they were doing to Winter.

Taran grinned. "Good girl," he said, though he worried slightly about Autumn, but she seemed to be sticking to the plan. Luckily, she wasn't a hot head.

Rex rubbed his lower lip as he leaned against a console. "Holly, you're sure the Zords' power problems have been sorted out?" he asked her. He was watching the duel. Lani was good, but the monster had the energy of three powerful beings. The first two were tough and he had a feeling this one would be the worst yet.

Holly nodded. "In fact, we've just completed the StegoZord. Combining with it instead of the StygiZord should give the finishing attack a 200% power boost," she explained.

Taran looked at her. "Seriously? I finally get a Zord?" he asked with a boyish grin on his face.

Tori and Manny giggled helplessly. "Boys and their big toys," Manny said.

Taran looked sheepish and cleared his throat. Rex snickered quietly. "Thanks, Holly. Good to know," he said.

Billie cocked her head at him. "Who put you in charge, anyway?" she asked him.

Rex held up his hands and shook his head, a silent denial that he was trying to be in charge. He turned toward the viewing globe just as Lani pulled a dirty trick on the monster.

-X-

Lani was getting nowhere fast. She had to tick this beast off. When Vivexia went to swipe at her, instead of using her sword to block, she bent backwards. She came back up with a handful of sand and threw it in her face. It was a dirty trick, but effective.

Vivexia stumbled back, screaming in rage and blinded. "So that's how you want play it?" she snarled and assumed her true monstrous form. Her orbs glowed and a bolt of energy was thrown at Lani. It hit her and sent her flying threw the air. She crashed into the ground an skidded. She lay motionless.

Six forms shimmered into view as the Rangers around them dropped their camouflage. Pink rushed over to check on Lani.

"Power Rangers who cheat. Interesting," Widow remarked.

"No one's cheating, cow!" Green shouted at her. She gripped her Staff, seething silently. What she wouldn't do to get her hands on that black eyed witch.

Widow tittered. "Speaking of stupid bovine, your brother says hello!"

Black had to actually put herself in front of Green to keep her from rushing over to the trio. "Don't," she said quietly.

"My, my, dear, I think you hit a sore spot," Roki murmured.

Vivexia was unfazed by finding herself surrounded by Power Rangers. "I'll take all of you on!"

Lani got to her feet and pushed Pink aside, a little annoyed they were all there. "No! You and me only!" she shouted. She twisted her wrists and made her cuffs appear. "It's Morphin Time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex!" she morphed, picked up her Power Sword and ran toward the monster. Vivexia ran toward her.

"Let's keep it fair. Zita, Putties?" Roki prompted.

Zita gave something of a bored yawn and flicked her fingers absently. Z Putty Patrollers began appearing and ganging up on the Rangers.

Silver summoned his CeratoSword and looked at the Putties. "You lads really want to try me?" he asked. There was a brief hesitation but they began pushing themselves forward to attack him.

Blue summoned his Power Lance. Nothing was quite so satisfying as smacking Putties around.

With one last glare at the evil trio, Green turned her attention to the Putties. So did Black. Pink occasionally hovered to give himself room to fire his Power Bow.

Red and Vivexia clashed in a massive grating of metal on metal and a shower of sparks.

-x-

"That's our cue. Let's Ranger up!" Rex said and twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Mastodon!"

"Triceratops!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Saber-toothed Tiger!"

"Stegosaurus!"

-x-

Widow gave a low growl when the Gold Ranger arrived. She stood. "I'm bored of this," she said. "The monster was defeated by her own ego," she said in disgust. "It's time to ready our pet," she added, giving a grin toward Gold. When she saw that he saw her, she gave him a finger wave and disappeared in a puff of black smoke.

Roki and Zita disappeared as well, leaving Vivexia to whatever fate awaited her, good or ill.

Sick of not getting the upper hand with the female Red Ranger, Vivexia jumped back and threw a volley of energy bursts at the entire scene. Rangers and Putties all were caught up in it. "You cannot defeat me!" she snarled and sent another volley at them.

Down and smoking, the Rangers struggled to their feet. "She has an extra orb," female Blue gasped. She'd just managed to discover that but has been felled before she could relay the information. Now it was too late. She got to her feet and threw one of her Power Sai. A small sub-dermal orb was skewered in the center of her three power orbs. She sparked and cried out in rage.

"Mega Power Cannon!" Red called out while the monster was distracted, trying to pull the sai from among her orbs.

"We can't! Only Tai can summon the Tyranno Sword," the femme Blue said. She glanced at her partner. They seemed to get on the same wavelength immediately when they glanced at Silver and Gold. "You, Lani, Nath, Wood and Chloe can combine with them," she said.

"Let's get to it," Gold agreed just as Vivexia managed to get the sai out of her face.

"You'll all pay now!" she screeched and her orbs glowed brighter than ever.

"Alpha Legend Cannon!" The weapons came together to create a most terrifying weapon. Vivexia unleashed a massive burst of powerful energy. "Fire!" A blinding prism of energy came from the cannon and met her energy, overpowered it, and pushed it back on her. Not only was she hot with their combined powers, but her own as well. She exploded in a deafening cacophony.

There was an eerie silence that followed. Vivexia suddenly came back together and grew enormous. "I told you, Rangers! You cannot defeat me," she said and tried valiantly to stomp Red.

She jumped out of the way and rolled. She came to her feet. "Zord time! TyrannoZord!"

"MastoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"PteroZord!"

"SaberZord!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The female Red, male Blue, male Black, female Pink, and female Yellow. The Zords took on Vivexia individually though she slashed at them with her sword and threw energy blasts at them.

Female Blue stopped Green from summoning her Zord with a touch of her arm and nodded toward Gold.

"Awaken the Stegosaurus!"

Within moments the golden StegoZord had arrived with a wicked looking spiked tail and teleported its pilot aboard. It whipped around and crashed the tail into Vivexia. "I'm joining this rodeo. Let's put this monster down," he said.

"Yes, let's," Red agreed. "Activating Megazord Configuration!" she hit the red button with a great deal of relish. The Zords began assembling together. The SaberZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StegoZord broke apart to form platelet armor over the chest, a platelet helmet and a humongous golden mace. All the Ranger pilots appeared in a shared cockpit. "Legendary StegoMegazord!"

Vivexia snarled and slashed at them with her sword. They blocked the blow with the StegoMace. Frustrated she began hacking at them, but the armor guarded them well when they weren't quick enough with the StegoMace.

"Man, she did a great job on the StegoZord," Blue declared.

Pink giggled. "Make sure you tell her," she teased her.

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," he came back.

Her helmet popped open long enough for her to stick her tongue out at him before getting serious. "That's it, time for a home run," she said and pressed a button at her console that gave her arm just a little more power when the StegoMegazord swung the StegoMace.

It contacted with Vivexia hard enough to knock the sword out of her hands. Enraged she staggered back

as her orbs began glowing. "This is your end, Rangers!" she shrieked. She put every ounce of her power into the burst of energy.

They threw up the StegoMace to block. The energy hit with enough force to stagger them back and cause their cockpit to spark, but most of the energy was absorbed by the StegoMace.

"Time for the finisher," Gold said. "StegoMace Super Charge Crash!" The StegoMace glowed brightly and the StegoMegazord hefted it over its head and brought it crashing down on her head, releasing not only their energy, but hers as well.

There were four distinct explosions. Three as the orbs exploded, the last as Vivexia exploded. The StegoMegazord turned its back.

"Dude, that was bad-@\$\$\$. Danny, you better stake your claim on that girl now," Black warned him. Blue's response was an unfriendly gesture.

Red sighed. "Let's go see if we did any good," she said. They agreed.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow paced in front of Winter who looked at her dully. Her reprogramming had made him quite obedient. "Are you ready to face your foe?" she asked him.

"Yes, Mistress," he said dully.

She patted him on the cheek. "Lay down and sleep. You need your rest," she said and walked out of the lab.

Winter shuffled to one of the beds but he didn't lay down, staring off into space aimlessly.

-X-

Tai had awakened within moments of Billie shattering the sub-dermal orb that was sapping his vitality, but it was taking him longer to get back to his old--er young--self. People had been popping in randomly to check on him, except the one person he really wanted to see. He wondered idly if she was still in a mood over what happened after his match. Then he wondered idly why she was so upset over that. A bit less idly he wondered if that meant something he could only hope it meant.

As if conjured by his not idle at all thoughts, Lani walked into the medi-lab. "How are you feeling?" she asked him as she moved over to his bed.

Tai quickly sat up on the side of the bed. The position put them nearly eye to eye, which was a bit surprising for them both. Lani always figured if the stars aligned just right and she got the chance to kiss him, she'd have to find a step stool. She pushed that thought aside trying not to laugh at her silly mental image.

"Ok," Tai finally answered, realizing he'd let an awkward amount of time pass before doing so.

"That's good. You had everyone worried," she said and pushed her hair behind her ears nervously.

"Ah," he murmured. "Lani?" he said, finally coming to a decision.

She moved closer to him. "Yes?" she asked, looking at him hopefully.

That look did him in. He reached out, his hands around her waist to pull her closer. Their mouths met.

Lani had to admit, for a guy who didn't seem all that great around girls, he sure knew to how to make her toes curl.

Tai actually hadn't meant to kiss her and was kind of surprised at himself, pulling back. She didn't seem mad though. Just bemused. "Will you go out with me?" he rushed out, feeling stupid that he did things all in the wrong order.

Lani flicked his ear then laughed. "Duh," she said and wrapped her arms around him, hugging him close for a moment. She was seriously considering kissing him again.

Applause at the door of the medi-lab surprised them both into springing apart. Rex at the forefront, her friends and several others were clapping. Lani turned as red as her favorite sneakers. Tai groaned, fell back in the bed and covered his face with the frilly pink pillow Tori had given him for his recuperation.

-xThe End Chapter 08x-



## 9 - Fair Day

Fox Oliver was laying low. It was his day off and he was trying to avoid Autumn, who had been in a mood for the past few days. Someone had seriously ticked his cousin off. That girl Rei was doing her best to be a buffer between Autumn and everyone else. The only person she didn't snarl at was that Taran guy. Though he'd noticed she also bit her tongue around that Tai guy as well.

He slept late so he was having a mid-morning snack. School was off that day because of the county fair so the Youth Center was actually a little empty. Looking well rested for a change, Danny and his friend Billie entered the Youth Center. They seemed excited. That chick was actually smiling and laughing. Danny spotted him and made his way over. "Yo, new guy. You got plans today?" he asked.

Fox paused with a breakfast burrito halfway to his mouth. "My main objective for the day was to avoid Autumn. That's pretty much it," he answered.

Danny snickered. "Perfect," he said. "We're going to the fair. You're comin' with," he said.

"Uh..." Fox shrugged. "Okay," he said. He had nothing better to do, besides it could be fun. "You sure it's ok with your friends?" he asked, nodding toward Wood and Nathan walking in to meet up with the other two.

"You've met them, right?" Billie said with a snort. Wood and Nath were the two people least likely to object to someone joining them.

"Tag alone, cool?" Danny asked them.

"Sure," Nath agreed with a shrug.

Wood gave a broad smile. "If we're going, let's go," he said.

Fox snickered. "What's got him so pumped?" he asked and stuffed the rest of the burrito in his face. Nath and Billie watched in horrified fascination.

"He heard Chloe tell me she was off to meet Tori at the fair when we were on the phone earlier," Danny answered. "I think you missed a crumb or two," he said. Fox grinned a mouthful of burrito as he stood.

Billie threw up her hands and headed toward to the door. "I have got to find some girl friends," she declared. The boys laughed at her and followed behind.

-x-

Autumn had been in a bit of a snit since her encounter with Widow and the Repulsas. She wasn't trying to take it out on everyone around her, but sometimes she couldn't help it. She finished cleaning the counters. They were about to just close for the day. The twins were whining about wanting to go the fair

with their friends. Nanna Mai was there because she entered several baked goods contests. Zack had to beg off work because he was giving a demonstration. With almost no customers, she didn't see the point of staying open.

Rei seemed pumped about going to the fair and was trying to convince to go along with her.

"I just don't feel up to it with everything," Autumn denied.

Rei wanted to argue but she was interrupted by two of their customers. "She's coming," Fey declared. Dropping by to get a drink to go was a pretense. Their ultimate goal was Autumn.

"Whether she likes it or not," Ros agreed.

"You're going?" Rei asked.

"We all are. Taran suggested we take the day to have fun at the fair," Fey answered.

"In that special way of his that actually made it sound like a suggestion," Ros said and the two women shared a chuckle.

Autumn was strangely fascinated. When the Reavers referred to Taran, it was as if they were talking about someone she'd never met. However, it was obvious how much they respected him.

"So, that means Taran will be there?" Rei asked innocently.

Ros and Fey grinned. "Should do," Ros answered.

"Besides, the only way you're going to get the dish from us about him is to come with us to the fair," Fey added.

Autumn sighed at such blatant bribery. She sighed and tossed her rag on the counter. "Fine. I'll toss the stragglers out and lock up," she said. Rei clapped her hands together and the older women shared triumphant grins.

-x-

The fair had been fun so far. They'd ridden rides, checked out the arts and crafts booths, and were now cruising the games. "Ooh! Billie, win me something big," Nathan begged suddenly as they came upon a balloon pop booth.

"Watch this," Danny said to Fox. The other boy raised a brow as Billie gave a great sigh and stepped up to the booth. Wood spotted something more interesting and ran off without a word.

Billie paid the vendor some money and was given a handful of weighted darts. Each of her tosses went where she intended them to. Looking disgruntled, the vendor checked the prize tags and told her she qualified for a smaller sized prize. She shook her head and demanded more darts. She was trading up for one of the big prizes hanging from the ceiling of the booth. Nathan was nearly bouncing.

"That's amazing," Fox said duly impressed.

"It ain't over yet," Danny said. He knew from past experience it was going to take awhile for her to get to the big prizes. "Girl will trip over a sidewalk crack, but she has a dead aim," he commented.

"What does it say?" Danny glanced up when he saw his sister coming toward them, thrusting a scroll in Rex's face.

"I told you, I can't read it. It's not Japanese," Rex said.

"But the lady was dressed like a shrine maiden and assured me it was an authentic Shinto charm," Chloe complained.

"Don't know what you tell you," Rex said.

Chloe made a face. She spotted the little group and hurried over. "She doing her thing?" she asked her brother. He nodded.

"Can I see the scroll?" Fox asked Chloe.

Raising a brow, she shrugged and handed it over. Fox glanced it over and burst out laughing. "It's fake. It's Chinese. It says 'Luck and Fortune' right enough, but that bit in the corner at the bottom says 'Made in China'," he said.

Chloe took the scroll back with a scoff. "I paid five bucks for this thing," she complained and crumpled it up. She stuck it in her purse and pouted.

"I thought you and Tori were hangin' today," Danny said to his sister, feeling no sympathy for her.

"I was until the cheerleaders needed her at their face-painting booth because someone broke a nail or something," Chloe answered, rolling her eyes. She pointed down the little avenue of booths. They saw a booth decorated in navy, gold and white. They could see Wood in the line.

"So that's what drew him away." Nathan said and laughed.

"How'd you hook up with him?" Danny asked, looking at Rex.

"She found me hiding from a bunch of 14 year olds," Rex admitted. He'd been forced to drive his sister and her friends to the fair and bring them home. Rena and her friends were more terrifying than a Patrol of Putties.

"Little sisters. Can't live with them, can't sell them on the internet," Danny commiserated. Chloe's fist met his arm. "Ow. Will you stop that?" he demanded and rubbed the sore spot. She smirked at him.

As the game drew on, they realized they were drawing a bit of a crowd. Finally, the final dart struck home. A small applause rose up. "Looks like you get one of the big prizes, little lady," the vendor said in

exasperation.

Billie looked at Nathan. "We'll take the love owl," he said, pointing to a pink and white owl with large eyes with heart shaped pupils. The vendor retrieved the stuffed bird and handed it over.

The slightly larger group moved on. "That was truly impressive," Fox stated. He'd never have thought Billie capable of something like that. She shrugged. Nathan walked along holding his new prize close.

They came upon the face-painting booth where Tori was in the middle of painting a saber-toothed tiger face on Wood. Manny was painting a T-Rex face on a little boy. Power Ranger themed face painting was popular this year. Holly sat in the booth taking apart a cheaply made replica of the Alpha Megazord.

"You look bored," Danny told her.

"You have no idea," she said as she studied one of the tiny parts, shaking her head at the shoddy engineering.

"My fault," Manny said. "We were supposed to cruise together but I got roped into covering someone's shift," she explained. She grinned. "And Lani's here on a date," she added cheekily.

Rex nodded. "Oh, believe me, I know," he said. He'd had endure endless hours of Tai worrying over the entire outing.

"You know, that's actually not the first couple I would have put money on," Fox commented and glanced over at Wood and Tori as she skillfully painted on his fangs as he attempted to hold still.

"Someone's observant," Chloe commented.

Something began to beep. Danny and Billie looked at each other. "It's time," she said.

Danny gave a whoop. "It's time!" he declared. "We gotta jet. See ya," he said. Beaming like goons he and Billie ran off.

"That something else I probably don't even want to know about?" Fox asked.

"More than likely," Rex answered. He glanced ahead and saw a strength tester. He could see a familiar towering lanky frame approaching. "Oh, this should be good," he said and headed that way. The others decided to follow. Even Manny and Tori closed the booth down after she finished Wood's face to go see what the draw was.

-x-

Autumn had to admit, she wasn't having a terrible time and the two Reaver women were a veritable font of information about Taran. She'd so far learned that Taran became a Reaver when he was fifteen because he saved Tori's life by holding up a sabotaged metal lighting catwalk. His actions caught the attention of Memphis Teague, the Reaver's leader. His early intensive training and good character made him a perfect fit. Even the fact that he was not human didn't make him stand-out. The Reavers'

Command Ship had several different types of alien races living and working there.

"I wish I knew people who knew Sora as well as they know Taran," Rei complained at one point. "He has a knack for talking without saying anything," she said, putting her hand on her hip.

Autumn shook her head. "I wish I could help," she said.

"There's our esteemed leader now," Fey said, spotting Taran up ahead walking with Hayden and Sora.

"And your mysterious Sora," Ros nudged Rei with her elbow.

Rei couldn't stop a grin. "Then let's catch up," she said. She grabbed Autumn's arm and sped up.

Taran heard them coming and glanced back. "Oh, good, goldarn," he muttered. Ros and Fey hanging around with Autumn couldn't be a good thing. She smiled at them when they caught up. "Good seeing you out and about," he said to Autumn with a smile.

"Yeah," she replied, returning the smile.

Rei dropped Autumn's arm and sidled up to Sora. "Fancy meeting you here," she greeted.

Sora smiled. "Seemed like fun. Thought you had to work," he said.

"Autumn was kidnapped so we closed up for the day," Rei answered with a shrug. Ros and Fey snickered together conspiratorially.

The small group moved along. They came upon the strength tester. The prizes here were the best ones yet. The large prizes were animal plushes in Power Ranger suits. The Reds were black bears, the Blues were spotted puppies, the Blacks were brown bears, the Pinks were white kitties, the Yellows were black kitties, the Greens were brown puppies. There were also tan rabbits in Gold and white rabbits in Silver.

Autumn laughed. "That's so cute," she said.

"Hey, win me something," Ros ordered Taran.

"I'll win one," Hayden volunteered before Taran could object. He stepped and handed over some money to the man running it.

"This should be good," Ros murmured.

Hayden took the mallet. "Just wait," he said. He planted his feet and steadied his grip on the mallet. He hefted it up and brought down on the platform with all his strength. The ball inside the tube only went about half way, proclaiming him a 'Mediocre Sweater Vest Guy'. Hayden scoffed. "It's clearly rigged," he muttered, ignoring the women laughing at him. For his troubles he was handed a tiny stuffed shark. "Lovely," he grumbled.

"Mind if I give it a shot?" Tai asked, approaching the strength test. So far, he felt his date was going well.

At least Lani was smiling and he hadn't made too much of doofus of himself. A win in his book. When he'd seen the game and the prizes, he'd thought it would be a fun opportunity.

"Sure, mate. Have a go. Maybe you'll have better luck," Hayden said.

Lani grinned. "I have faith in him," she said.

Tai paid the vendor for a chance.

"If you can't do it, no one else has a chance," Rex drawled as he approached. Tai looked around and suddenly realized he had an interested audience. He felt heat creep up the back of his neck. He cleared his throat. He hefted the hammer and crashed it into the platform. It pronounced him a 'Mediocre Sweater Vest Guy' as well. He flattened his lips and took the stuffed animal the vendor offered him.

"I think Hayden's right. It's rigged," he complained.

Lani giggled as he handed over the little flop eared mouse plush. "You did your best," she said.

"In other words, you wimped out and she's too polite to hold it against you," Rex said.

"It might just be jammed. Maybe Taran should fix it and get me one of them cute little gold bunnies," Ros suggested strongly.

Tai raised a brow. "Oh, be my guest if we're playing it that way," he said and gestured to the game.

"Being a creepy alien comes in handy sometimes," Taran remarked. Shaking his head, he fished some money out of his wallet and paid the vendor for the turn. He smacked the platform with the mallet. The ball rose up to ring the bell with a solid clang. The vendor looked abashed but handed him the Gold Ranger bunny.

Ros snatched it with glee. "It's so cute and I'm gonna name him Creepy Alien," she said. Autumn couldn't help laughing when Taran rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"I'll give it another go," Tai declared. He paid the vendor again. He cracked his knuckles and took up the mallet. He used a burst of genetically enhanced strength and smacked the button. Once again the ball shot up with a solid ringing of the bell. "We'll take the Red Ranger," he said to the now sick looking vendor. He gave the Ranger bear to Lani.

She hugged it close. She made face at Rex and gave him the puny mouse. He patted his cheek a bit too hard. "You deserve this now scoot off somewhere else and look pretty," she told him with a grin.

Before Rex could retort, the strong man game exploded.

Taran had just managed to put himself between himself and the girls when the explosion happened. Others weren't so prepared and were sent flying. He looked around. Holding a green bladed scimitar in one and a power blaster in the other, the male Green Ranger stood there. "I win," he said in a way that made it sound like he struggled just to speak.

-X-

The Blue Team was working in Command Center. They were in their lab. Beta Z was watching them with something akin to excitement. "When the power levels reach 100% the entire Command Center will go offline," Danny reminded Dr. Bill who was in the Power Chamber, also waiting for the pre-programmed changes they'd been working on for several weeks to be activated.

Something began to beep. "95%," Beez reported. "96, 97, 98, 99--" she powered off at the same time as everything in the Command Center went dark.

Suddenly there was an electronic hum as the Command Center came back online, shifting itself into a new configuration where necessary, updating itself. In the Power Chamber, many changes happened. It entirely restructured itself. There was no longer a viewing globe. Instead there was a series of flat screen monitors along the walls with several terminals for access to the CPU.

One of the screens came on to reveal the face of a young brunette. "Command Center Central Computer, online," she reported.

The hologram of a young woman appeared in front of Dr. Bill, making him jump. "Holographic Interface, online. Greetings, Billy," she said.

The lights in the lab came back on. The tube that had previously housed Beta Z opened with a hiss of air and a woman stepped out. She was young with lavender colored eyes and medium length brown hair. She wore a white and purple dress and tights with knee high boots. "Command Center reboot complete. Hello, I am Beta Z," she greeted the Blues.

-X-

Widow and Roki had been taking in the fair while they schemed. They blended in, dressed casually as Earthlings. She spit out a melted gob of cotton candy. "That was vile," she declared. "Ugh, we are doing this planet a favor by destroying humans," she said and tossed the cotton candy aside.

Roki wrinkled his nose. "Yes," he agreed. He couldn't have been paid enough to try that fluffy pink monstrosity. His wife was even braver than he was.

"Hey, you can't throw that there!" some one shouted at her. She flicked her wrist and whoever that was went crashing into the crowd.

"It's time for the real fun begin," Roki said when he heard the nearby explosion.

Widow smirked. "And just to make sure the other Rangers don't interfere," she flicked her wrist again. A large teddy bear with fierce jaws and claws appeared. One of it's glass eyes was dangling by a string and it had several patches in it's mottled and matted hide "Fluffinhesser, destroy this place," she ordered.

"Ehehe, gladly," the monster said in a goofy sort of voice. He began spitting energy balls from it's gaping

maw, exploding stalls, food stands and whatever else might be in it's way.

Zita walked up behind her brother and Widow. "Try some popcorn," she said and held the bag out to them. They thanked her and took the popcorn. She nodded and snapped her fingers. Putties began appearing to help the chaos spread.

-x-

"Win!" Autumn shouted and tried to go to her brother. Taran blocked her and Rei grabbed her arm.

"I don't think that's exactly Winter right now," Rei warned her.

"I come for him," the male Green grunted, pointing his sword at Taran. Autumn gasped. His aura was muddy and gross looking.

"Power Rangers, there are Putties and a monster in another part of the fairgrounds," a strange voice said over their communicators.

"Taran, stay here and handle this. We'll handle that," Tai said. He spotted Fox where he'd fallen, thrown a fair distance by the strength test exploding. "Crap," he muttered.

"We'll get him safe," Hayden told Tai when he saw the kid sitting up groggily and cradling his arm. He and the two women went to coral him.

"It's Morphin' Time!"

When the Rangers Morph they began to move toward the monster disturbance. The male Black hesitated. "I have to find my sister," he said. The male Red nodded.

"I'll help," the female Black said.

For a moment, Silver felt torn. Part of him wanted to go to the monster as ordered, part of him wanted to stay and help Gold, and another part of him wanted to help the Blacks. He suddenly felt a strange lurching feeling in his gut. He blinked, He was suddenly looking at two other hims. "Right," he said and the other two nodded. One went to join the Black Rangers, one went to join the rest of the Rangers. He remained, being gaped at by Gold, Green and Rei.

"Beats me, too," he said.

"Don't matter," Green said jumped into the middle of the two Rangers. He'd been juiced to the maximum and seemed to have no qualms about playing dirty against teammates. Rei watched while she tried to figure out what had been done to him.

-x-

Fluffinhesser and Putty Patrollers were destroying everything in their path. Rides lay in smoking ruins. The Blue Rangers were already on the scene. Male Blue was trying to get to the monster, but female



Blue went down in an inelegant sprawl when a Putty tripped her.

Male Red shook his head and fired his Power Blaster and went to help her up. "That's it. You, Wood and Nathan are getting some training starting asap," he said.

She sniffed and tossed a Power Sai over his head and hit a Z-Putty square on. "Fine," she said. She could admit she needed the training.

He nodded and decided to let her partner cover her. He turned his attention to the monster. "Hey ugly, over here," he said and drew his sword.

The monster turned toward him and giggled oddly. "Heeuk, heeuk, heeuk. Well what do we got here?" he blew energy balls at him. He deflected most of the blasts but one knocked him off his feet. The monster didn't seem to have any Reaver orbs powering it, but he was no lightweight.

-x-

The Black Team and one of the Silver Rangers found Rena Hart and her friends being terrorized by Putties. Several of girls were screaming, but not Rena. She squared off against the Putty ring leader. She kicked out and hit him in the Z, making him disintegrate. "Take that," she said sassily and made a face at the rest of them. Her friends squealed again.

The three Rangers drew their blasters and fired over their heads at the Putties. "You girls get out of here," male Black ordered, making his voice deeper.

"I have to find my brother," Rena denied.

"Go somewhere safe. He'll find you," Silver instructed, effecting an American accent.

She seemed torn.

"Come on, Rena. Let's go wait for him at his car," one of the girls said. The other two grabbed her and dragged her away.

Female Black snorted. "Is she a Hart or is she a Hart?" she commented. Silver chuckled.

"Haha, let's go end that monster," male Black said.

-x-

The male Green Ranger knocked back one of the Silver Rangers and then jumped at the Gold Ranger in full force. The two met. Rei took a deep breath. "Cover me for a second," she said to him.

"What d'you think you're going to do?" he asked her. She didn't answer, making a white ball appear in her hand. It was similar to the one she first used on the Skeleton Ranger. She dashed forward and threw the ball.

It hit the male Green Ranger. He stumbled, grunted and turned toward Rei enraged and ran at her, preparing to cut her down. Silver jumped in front of her and blocked with his CeratoSword.

Rei was consternated. She dashed over to Gold. "You'll have to do it," she said.

"Do what?" he asked warily.

"The spell. It's how I kept knocking sense into Sora when he was the Skeleton Ranger. My power is enough to counteract Zita but not Widow's. You're the only one with the potential to counteract whatever magic she's done on him," she said.

Gold shook his head. "I ain't a sorcerer," he denied and went to help Silver with Green.

Rei sighed and stomped her foot. "You'll have to become one eventually," she muttered. She summoned another spell. "Duck!" she shouted. Without thinking the two Rangers ducked. She tossed a powerful spell at Green. It connected and exploded. He went flying, knocked unconscious. She winced.

Before anyone could get to him, he disappeared.

Gold muttered a curse. "Autumn ain't gonna like that," he said.

"We'll think of something. Let's go help the others," Silver said.

-x-

There was a briefly confusing moment when the Blacks and Silver joined the fight, only to be followed by Gold and Silver and Rei. The three Silvers met up and merged into one again. "That was bloody strange," he commented, happy to be whole again.

"Yeah...I bet," male Black said, cocking his head.

"We can deal with his split personality later. Let's get rid of this monster," male Red said. "Mega Power Cannon!" Six Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon.

The male Red Ranger aimed the Cannon. "Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger. Six points of energy swirled into the monster and exploded through him. The monster exploded.

He came back together and grew to enormous proportions. "Heeuk, heeuk, heeuk," Fluffinhesser chortled eagerly. He danced over to the Ferris wheel and pushed it over. He clapped his hands. "Wheeee! So fun," he said, seeming to totally forget the forget the Rangers.

"Zord time, people," male Red said.

"It is time for Sora to awaken the Ceratosaurus," the unfamiliar voice said.

"TyrannoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"MastoZord!"

"PteroZord!"

"SaberZord!"

"Awaken the Ceratosaurus!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The male Red, male Blue, female Black, female Pink, and male Yellow.

The silver CeratoZord appeared, a small armed dino with a strong tail. Silver was teleported to a cockpit. He charged toward the monster, head down and knocked him aside.

"Let's bring them together," male Red said. "Activating Megazord Configuration," he said and pressed the red button. The Zords began assembling together. The SaberZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The CeratoZord broke apart to form armor, a helmet and the tail compressed, flattening into a giant version of the CeratoSword. The pilots appeared in the shared cockpit. "Legendary CeratoMegazord!"

"Heeuk, heeuk, heeuk. That's kind of scary," Fluffinhesser said tremulously and stumbled back. He began firing energy balls at them. The CeratoSword knocked them aside. He stamped a fuzzy foot. "Batter Up!" he said a little more seriously and opened his jaws to unbelievable degrees.

"Oh, that doesn't look good," Black said.

"Brace!" Blue shouted just as energy balls began to shoot from his mouth in rapid succession. They were unable to fully compensate for the change in speed. They were hit. Small explosions wracking them.

Fluffinhesser began to cough and hack, pounding in his chest trying to blockage that suddenly stopped his attack.

Smoking and sparking the CertoMegazord rallied. "Let's get him while he's distracted," Pink said.

"Right O," Silver said. "CeratoSword Quicksilver Slash!" The Megazord powered forward and slashed with the CeratoSword several times then jumped aside. There was a pause, then all the slash marks riddling Fluffinhesser began to glow as he slowly slid apart before exploding.

"We got him," Silver said.

"Unfortunately, the fair is kinda ruined," Black murmured looking over what was left of the fairgrounds.

Red sighed. "We'd better go regroup," he said.

"And who the heck is that on our communicators?" Yellow asked.

"That is a good question. Let's get to the Command Center," Blue said, a grin in voice.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Winter woke up, feeling groggy, in pain but actually himself. He hadn't felt like himself in weeks. He was strapped into a bed in Widow's lab. She stood nearby talking in a furious hiss to Zita. "Let me go," he said thickly. His brain and his mouth didn't seem to want to cooperate.

Widow turned to him and scowled. "See? It was just a delayed reaction. Her puny spell was enough to jar him," she complained. "If you don't do something about her, I will," she said to her sister-in-law as she approached him with a syringe.

Zita seethed. "I will do something about her," she said and turned on her heel and strode out of the lab.

"Stop," Win said as Widow prepped his arm for injection. She didn't even acknowledge that he spoke. She just gave him the injection and whatever there was of him simply fizzled out.

Sighing and pursing her lips, Widow left him there.

-x-

The new and improved Command Center was a bit of a shock. The three Beta Z's were an even bigger shock.

"I must admit, I'm truly impressed and amazed by what you two managed to accomplish. She is a marvel," Holly said, looking Beta Z over, walking in a circle around her.

"Thank you, Holly," Beta Z said with a smile. "With my new body and connection to the Command Center Central Computer, I will be able to better assist you all," she said, still beaming.

"Not to mention the ability to access me at any point within the Command Center," said the Beez in the monitors.

"My holographic network also extends to all parts of the Command Center," the hologram Beez added.

"That's all very impressive. Can you organize a community clean-up for the fairgrounds?" Tai asked, his most pressing concern at the moment. Even the Winter situation wasn't such a priority. He was no worse off than before, and they even seemed to have more information. He knew that didn't help Autumn any, but she had her friends around her to help her through this.

"It is being done," Beez assured him.

"How's Fox?" Nathan asked.

"He was admitted to Angel Grove General. He has a mild radial fracture," Beez answered. "He has been discharged,"

Autumn sighed and Rei patted her arm. "Why don't you go check on Fox," she suggested.

"I'll go with," Taran volunteered. He could tell by the way Rei just glared at him that she wanted to corner him about this magic business. He just wasn't sure she had it right when it came to him.

Autumn gave a weak smile. "Thank you, Taran. I'm sorry my brother is trying to kill you," she said.

"I won't hold it against him. 'Sides, ain't his fault. My sister is trying to kill me using your brother," he said. She even managed a small laugh. They teleported out of the Command Center.

"The rest of us can join the community clean-up," Tai said. The others agreed, except Rex, who wasn't there. As soon as they defeated the monster he went to take care of his sister and her friends. They left the Command Center.

Tai took Lani aside when they arrived. "I'm sorry for the way things ended," he said.

She smiled and kissed his cheek. "It was fantastic until then. And you won me a cute little Red Ranger bear. This is going into the good column," she said. He smiled sheepishly. She gave him a quick kiss before running off to join her friends to help with the clean-up. Grinning from ear to ear, Tai went to join in as well.

-xThe End Chapter 09x-

## 10 - Coming Unchained

The same thing happened several times over the next few weeks. The male Green Ranger would arrive to challenge Taran while a monster and the Putty Patrol would attack elsewhere to distract the other Rangers. In the end, the Rangers would scrape by with a victory. Taran wasn't always so lucky.

Rei had finally convinced Taran to try the spell she'd suggested, but he'd absolutely failed. It was frustrating for her because she knew that with his family history he should be able to master it with some practice. He couldn't even conjure a spark of magical energy. She just didn't get it. Although, being able to split himself into three pieces, some form of Sora was usually there to help, Rei wasn't always able to be.

It was Zita's doing she knew. She was often targeted by large black feathered humanoid birds called Tenga Warriors. Luckily she also usually had a Sora around at these times. From what she remembered from being part of Zita, the supply of Tengas was nearly depleted. While this often meant she couldn't help Winter or Taran until they'd nearly beaten each other to a pulp, it also told her the spell must be having some effect. Otherwise, her interference wouldn't require the use of such a precious commodity to distract her. If only she could figure out what was keeping Taran from using his magic.

Tai had also kept his word to start training any of the Rangers who weren't necessarily their strongest fighters. Just so these less than strong fighters didn't feel picked on, he tested everyone. He knew everyone had something to contribute to the team, but the ability to defend oneself and one's partner was a priority.

Perhaps not his best idea. After all, more than half the team were martial arts champions and demonstrated it. Even Autumn, though she never competed, always trained and kept up with her brother, who had a wall of trophies himself. Tori, who's parents and guardian had been Reavers, had been trained from a young age. The Kennedy's were multiple national champions in Karate. Rex's trophies included gymnastics, basketball and baseball but karate or kendo, both of which he learned from the same source as Tai, Grandpa. Taran admitted to being well trained in several different disciplines but did not compete since he had an advantage he couldn't turn off. Sora revealed his was a Master of a Kovarian style of martial arts no one on Earth would be familiar with. Manny had to join the extra training session. Though she'd taken karate when she was younger, she gave it up when being a cheerleader was a lot more fun. That was sometime in junior high. She didn't mind a refresher, specially since it helped her be a better Ranger.

That settled, Jason gladly volunteered his Dojo for their tutelage, but he couldn't always oversee their training personally. Fortunately for him, another ex-Power Ranger had wandered back to Angel Grove, looking for a job. Adam Park was a master of his discipline. Though a quiet and reserved, soft spoken sort of man, he eagerly put Billie, Wood, Nathan and Manny through their paces. He quickly shut down any complaints Billie may have thought of. Even she had to admit, however, she was getting better. She met the ground less than usual since training. Though she refused to relinquish her addiction to caffeine.

They were doing so well, he even entered them into the white belt round of the Angel Grove Teen

Karate Tournament.

-x-

## **The Moon**

The quiet of the Sea of Tranquility was shattered suddenly and violently. A swirling, glowing vortex opened with a crack. In what sounded very much like a giant leaf blower, two figures were discharged. The vortex closed with another crack. "After all these years you'd think I'd be used to this," said the male figure. He was large but not overly tall with golden tanned skin, slightly slanted black eyes and long black hair.

"That's because you always tense up. If you'd just relax and go with it, it wouldn't be so bad," said his companion, a slim athletic looking woman with slanted blue eyes, golden hued skin, and long curly hair the color wheat and gold.

They both dressed similarly. Black leather body suits with golden scorpion themed armor over it. They even wore headdresses reminiscent of scorpion tails. They were both young, barely not teenagers, yet they carried a lifetime of troubles around with them.

The young man grunted. "Do we have the right place this time?" he asked.

The young woman checked a device connected to her gauntlet. "The dimensional coordinates appear to be correct. The anchor is that way," she pointed. "I think we have it right this time, Griff. I think we made it home," she said.

"Then let's go say hi to the family," he said. Grifforzer and his twin sister Lammy began walking toward the Palace.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow knew that the Green Ranger didn't have much left in him. He maybe had one or two more uses left. Currently he was chained up in the lab with his own consciousness. Widow did not want to deal with him, so she let him be for a few days with instructions for Finster to feed and water him. The entire palace was tense. Zita was bear dealing with her look-a-like and Roki had been quietly brooding or doing experiments in his own lab.

She was having a lie in when she felt the disturbance. She lifted her head off her husband's chest and looked around.

"What was that?" Roki asked, coming alert.

Widow scrambled out of bed. She quickly dressed herself. "That is powerful magic. Someone opened a portal. The twins have returned," she said and went out to the hall. Roki was not far behind, dressing hurriedly. Scorpina and Goldarr came out into the hall. Though Scorpina chose a warrior's path, she was

not unfamiliar with magic.

Looking grumpy but perplexed, Zita left her room as well. "What is it?" she asked.

Scorpina clasped her hands against her chest. "My babies are coming home," she said.

Three knocks resounded through the palace.

Winter roused slightly at the sound. He blinked, frowning at the Putty Patroller bring him his daily ration of water and Bologna sandwich. At least he hoped it was Bologna and not moon rat. "What goes on?" he asked. He grimaced painfully as his skin literally crawled. Pieces of exoskeleton formed on his face and patches on his skin. The discomfort quickly passed. The only sound the Putty could actually make was a trilling sound that told him nothing.

Shaking his head, Winter took the food and wolfed it down. It wasn't enough. He'd seen Taran eat when Autumn wasn't around. A dry Bologna sandwich was nothing. Even after he finished the sandwich, his stomach growled. He knew whatever was going on, Widow would be by to either gloat or complain sooner or later.

He rubbed his wrists where the chain chafed his skin. He wasn't going anywhere. He'd find out eventually.

-x-

The Youth Center was brimming as usual on competition days. Autumn had everyone on hand. From the twins to Zack to Nanna Mai. Even Fox wasn't spared despite the cast on his lower arm and wrist. He pushed a cart around and bussed the tables. He almost burst out laughing when his new friends entered wearing their pajamas. Though he had to admit, Chloe made it work, Billie just looked awkward. And crankier than usual.

"Don't we all look spiffy," he quipped. "I didn't know we were having a sleep-over theme today."

"Don't try to be funny. It doesn't look good on you," Billie growled.

"Ouch, that stung," Fox commented.

"Ignore her. Adam cut off her caffeine yesterday and made her get a full night sleep. He doesn't understand she doesn't function without Colombian oil flowing through her veins," Nathan said and straitened his gi. He was mildly put out himself because Adam forbade from using a pink highlighter to spiff it up a bit. It wasn't like he wanted to color his whole belt pink.

Wood was bouncing, totally excited for his first proper match. Despite the fact that TJ had training, he'd kind of been his mother's baby. He took dance and ice skating rather than karate or baseball. His brother sometimes took pity on him and offered to show him a thing or two and help him prepare for matches himself. "Yeah. Be afraid," he said sagely.

Fox made a face. "I'm properly afraid," he declared and pushed his cart away from them.



Danny shook his head at them. "Don't listen to them, Billie. You'll do fine," he said.

Chloe snorted. "Look, you guys, I don't expect champions but please don't make me ashamed to say that I know youse," she said. She tightened her black belt and walked into the competition area to sign-in.

"What she said," Danny said and went to sign-in. "Son of a--"

"What's wrong?" Chloe asked.

"Tai's competing," he complained. "There goes this round," he muttered. The few times they'd face each other over the years, Danny wasn't able to defeat him.

"I thought he was dedicating to Kendo this year," she commiserated. Another name caught her eye on the sign-in sheet. "Look who else is competing," she said.

Danny grimaced. "I had it in the bag. Why?" he complained. Rex's name was on the sheet as well.

One of the officials was listening to him gripe. "Relax, honey. They're a degree higher than you are. You won't be facing either of them," she assured him with a smack of her gum and a flirty wink.

"Eh? When did they get higher than me?" Danny sputtered. That somehow seemed worse, especially since Rex didn't compete and Tai's main focus was Kendo.

"We were tested last June," Rex answered from beside them. The gi he wore was black with the Watanabe dragon seal emblazoned on the breast in red. Tai was nearby talking with an old Japanese man dressed in a loud Hawaiian shirt, loud Bermuda shorts, white socks nearly to his knees and tan sandals. He wore the same uniform. "Besides, I'm tired of the disrespect just because I don't have a karate trophy," he said with a grin.

Danny snorted. "You still ain't gettin' one. My moneys on Tai," he said.

"I'll take that bet. How much," Chloe said. She gave Rex a wink. She had to stand up for her partner after all.

"Twenty," Danny said and held out his hand.

"It's on like Donkey Kong, bro," she said and shook his hand firmly.

"Why you guys really competing?" Danny asked.

"Grandpa asked us to," Rex answered. He nodded toward a Japanese man of a similar age to Grandpa but he wore a crisp suit. "Apparently Sensei Fukinawa there and Grandpa have history. From what I understand, back when they all came to America, he and Grandpa's brother were friends. They had a falling out when Fukinawa hit on Grandpa's lady. In a slightly forceful way. Grandpa beat the crap out of him. All before they got off the boat. Fukinawa vowed vengeance and settled in Stone Canyon. Grandpa

settled here and didn't give him a second thought."

"What's the moral of the story?" Wood asked. He, Manny, Billie and Nathan had come to sign-in as well when Adam and Manny arrived. They'd wondered over when they saw Rex was competing.

"Well, Grandpa may have put Fukinawa out of his mind, but the other man never forgot. He'd trained his kids and now his grandkids. He's been wheedling Grandpa for years about Fukinawa Karate being stronger than Watanabe Karate. Basically talking smack because his grandson, er that charming one there," he nodded toward a nerdy boy in a white gi attempting to pop one of several pimples spread across his cheeks, "has been winning several national comps the past few years. This year he issued a formal challenge. Fukinawa Karate," he nodded again toward the pimply kid, who appeared to have several team mates, "versus Watanabe Karate. Which where we come. Our objective: make Fukinawa wish he'd took his licks like a man and never challenged the Watanabe again," he explained.

"You really saying that pizza face is really the same degree as you guys?" Chloe asked.

"Yep. You guys will be facing some of the others. I know you're all wearing the Scott logo but--"

"Ey, no worries here. We'll make them wish they'd stayed home in Stone Canyon," Danny said. Chloe nodded.

"We'll do our best!" Wood vowed.

"We sure will. I know one of those girls. She thought she was hot stuff and got all up my business in a cheer comp last month. We shut down her team then, we'll do again," Manny declared and straightened her yellow belt, the same as her perceived rival.

Nathan and Billie looked uneasy but Nath chuckled. "Did anyone hear the cat growling?" he asked.

Billie rolled her eyes. Manny laughed. "Sure did," she agreed.

Tai finally finished talking with Grandpa and walked over to them. "I see Rex has been spreading tales," he said. Rex grinned and gave a shrug. "I know this probably goes without saying but," he took a deep breath, "No levitating, no leaping, no turning invisible, no super speed, no forcefields, no densing, no super strength and no..." he looked at Rex perplexed. Though Beta Z and Billy had been testing the limits of their genetic mutations, it still surprised him that Rex didn't have one.

Rex chuckled. "No blinding smiles," he finished. He was slightly confused as to why he didn't have an ability associated with his Power Coin like everyone else.

"Right," Tai agreed.

"The Fukinawa Dojo is not to be taken lightly," Adam said as he joined them. He'd heard part of the tale, but an official had taken his attention a way to ask about Jason, who was supposed to give a demonstration at the start of the tournament. All eyes turned to him.

"That's right. You're originally from Stone Canyon. You've faced them before?" Tai asked.

Adam nodded. "Rocky, Aisha and I often butted heads against Yousuke Fukinawa and his team mates. That's Fukinawa-sensei's eldest grandson," he explained. "It is perhaps a good thing he did not know I was teaching here. He may not have resisted coming. I'm surprised he didn't," he admitted. "Don't worry so much on beating Fukinawa. Concentrate on doing the best you can," he encouraged his novices.

An official announced that the opening ceremony will begin soon and that spectators and competitors are to take their seats.

"That's you, rookies," Jason said, coming over. He'd finally made it. Though his students and Adam wore white, he wore red with his red and gold belt on display. Though he hadn't trained Chloe and Danny, when they'd returned to Angel Grove, they signed up at his Dojo before they even knew the true role he'd play in their lives. They'd been sensei-less for a couple of years now, since their old teacher retired to Florida. The group of Scott competitors and the two Watanabe competitors took their seats, A small but loud cheer went up from the spectators for them. Every Ranger that wasn't competing or working was there, even a few retired Rangers. They could also see Beta Z in the crowd.

"Yeah, that's not helpful at all," Billie said, feeling sick.

"Danny's right. It'll be OK, Glitch," Nathan assured her and put a hand on her arm, giving it a small squeeze. She managed a small smile.

The official announced Jason Lee Scott and the opening ceremonies began.

-x-

Grifforzer and Lammy were met with the open arms of their mother. Then she crushed them in a maternal hug. She didn't care that they'd traveled around dimensions for what amounted to fifteen years to them and they arrived home only a few weeks after they disappeared thanks to an inter-dimensional anchor that someone had affixed to the original portal. She was just happy to have her babies home.

Goldarr, too, was pleased with how they'd turned out. He enjoyed hearing about the way they had earned a living, bounty hunting inter-dimensional criminals all while following the faint traces of the anchor. Widow was impressed with Lammy's use of magic at such a young age. Lammy didn't explain to them that though being sucked into the vortex was an accident, she'd created it on purpose. It suited her to allow everyone to believe that it was all unintentional and she was just randomly reading spells.

After a meal with the family, they'd been shown to rooms they could use.

Zita was feeling very strange. She retired to her room after giving Roki a handful of Tenga pods.

Griff grew bored rather quickly and wondered who around there could give him a decent spar. Lammy was exploring and found the lab. "They still you, I see," she commented when she saw Winter chained up sitting on the floor and dozing. He snapped to attention when he heard her voice. He blinked several times, wondering if he was hallucinating.

Armor clinking slightly as she moved, Lammy went to Widow's work station and checked out her notes.

She turned to see him watching her. "Cat got your tongue?" she asked.

"Hard to speak," he said slowly. His skin spasmed again. Lammy watched the exoskeleton ripple over his face. His hair was too long and he was in serious need of a shave. "Who you?" he asked.

She squatted down to be more on his level. "Don't recognize me? Well, true I was a lot smaller then," she said and gave a slight smile. "I remember you as being a lot bigger," she added.

He stared at her for a moment, then remembered the tousle headed blond toddler and her pesky dark haired brother. "Lammy," he said.

"Hmm, I wonder if Widow realizes how much you absorb even in your gorilla-like Kill-Tarantules state," she said.

"What you want?" he asked. "Want a turn?" he asked and looked at where a syringe filled with the green liquid awaited Widow's whim.

She followed his gaze. She gave a shudder. "Not me. I abhor needles," she said. She heard footsteps approaching.

Winter heard them too. He knew by the sound of the gaits that it was Roki and Widow. Fear curled his gut. They were finally coming for him. "Last time," he said. Widow hadn't made it a secret that this was probably the last treatment he would survive.

Lammy glanced at him. "I know. Good bye, Green Ranger," she said and left the lab before Widow and Roki arrived.

"This is your last chance, Green Ranger. I've decided to double the dose in hopes that you'll finally defeat Tarantules. If not, well, one less Ranger to worry about," she said and approached him with the syringe.

Winter didn't bother to respond as she doped him. He gave a painful spasm as he lost himself.

Roki watched her. He turned when Griff approached. "Hey, can I play with that?" he asked, pointing toward what used to be Winter.

Roki considered it. "Fine, but don't tire him out. He has a purpose," he agreed. He made his Red Orb topped staff appear. He tapped it on the floor. Both Griff and the Green Ranger appeared in the Dark Dimension.

Roki was torn between watching and seeing about Finster's progress with the new monster. "What are the Power Rangers doing?" he asked Widow.

"Let us see," she said and drew a circle with her finger in the air. "I spy with my little eye, Power Rangers," she intoned. The portal rippled to reveal the Karate Tournament. They watched in great amusement as Billie lost her first match. "Unfortunately, she did rather a lot better than I would have thought," Widow said thoughtfully and waved the portal away.

Roki nodded. "I'd better go yell at Finster to hurry up," he said and left the lab. Widow tapped her lip. She left to check on Zita only to be met with an ardent command to leave her be.

-X-

The Green Ranger and Griff sparred while Lammy watched. She shook her head. "True he has the strength of a Rachnaemance and Wolzyrd but he's not very bright right now," she said.

"Easy for you to say," Griff grunted as he rubbed his jaw where the Green Ranger landed a blow.

Lammy shook her head. "It's true. Tarantules probably holds back for fear of harming his friend. Widow is doubtlessly banking on this, but perhaps you should give him a dose of what he would truly be dealing with should Tarantules choose to show his true strength," she prompted.

The Green Ranger paused and looked at her. He didn't really have but a vague idea what Widow and Taran were. He assumed something like a combination of Scorpina and Goldarr, strange as it may seem.

Griff grinned. He began to grow and change shape. He grew extra appendages, an exoskeleton, monstrous features. He looked a lot like an enormous black scorpion with a humanoid torso sticking out of it with something resembling a face with pincers. He also had feathery black wings and golden armor around the chest area and a helmet.

"Well?" Lammy prompted. The Green Ranger charged but quickly had to avoid a whipping scorpion tail.

"Enough!" Widow barked. "I said not to tire him out," she scolded her little brother. Griff shifted shapes again but pouted. It was just getting fun. "It'll be a cold day in hell before Tarantules revealed his monster form to his human friends," she said with a smirk. "Go rest," she told the Green Ranger and snapped her fingers. He disappeared. Widow looked at her siblings and smiled. "It is nice to have a brother who embraces his legacy, however," she said and disappeared in a wisp of smoke.

Lammy sighed. "You hear that?" she asked.

Griff shrugged. "I don't mind sticking around til I wear out my welcome. Are you sure about this?" he asked.

Lammy nodded. "I'm very close. I don't care about Widow and her schemes. They're in my way right now," she said. "Let's go get lunch," she said and disappeared in a golden puff of smoke. Griff did not consider himself a magic user, but that was one trick he did utilize and did so now, following his sister to find food.

-X-

Though Billie lost her match, she thought she did rather well and congratulated herself by going to the Juice Bar to get an extra large iced coffee. She rejoined the others to watch the remainder of the match. Nathan did well, winning his match. So did Wood. There weren't very many white and yellow belt matches

in the competition. Most of teenagers here were green and above. She pulled a PDA from the bag she had with her.

"At least pretend to be interested," Nath said, jostling her arm.

"I'm not turning into Hilary Swank over here. I'm doing this one reason only. To help the team, specifically my partner," she said.

Nathan huffed and bit the inside of his lip.

Manny ended up being the first to face a Fukinawa. She'd sweep-kicked the Skeleton Ranger when she was out of practice. Some stuck-up little cheerleader wannabe was no contest.

Tai felt his wrists buzz. He excused himself and walked off alone. He twisted his wrists and made his cuffs appear. "Tai here. Go," he said.

"A monster and Putties have appeared in downtown Angel Grove. A large clutch of Tenga Warriors are joining them," Beez's voice said.

Tai hissed. "All right, Buzz Lani, Rex, Billie, Manny, Tori, Autumn, Taran and Sora. No sign of Winter?" he asked.

"Negative. Ay yi yi. I'm afraid he'll just show up when Taran does. What about Rei?" she asked.

"Where Sora goes, Rei goes," Tai said drily. Now he could hear the monster alert going off in the city. He watched the chosen Rangers begin slinking off. His and Rex's matches would be two of last ones for the day. He debated the merits of going as well, but he trusted Rex and Lani to handle things. "Let me know if things get out of hand," he added.

"Will do," Beez assured him.

He made his cuffs disappear and he rejoined his group. Grandpa looked at him. "*Fukinawa-san is not more important than saving the world,*" he said. Though he didn't often mention it, Grandpa was well aware of the Ranger goings-on with his grandson. Akira Watanabe had crafted Power Ranger blades for many years now, a fact that Tai only just discovered.

"*It's less Fukinawa-san and more not drawing attention to everyone leaving at once during a monster crisis,*" Tai explained.

Grandpa nodded. "*My grandson has grown wise,*" he remarked.

-x-

Buggle-Boo was a bug-like monster made to Roki's specifications. No more silly monsters from Finster's television rotted mind. She has a specific purpose. She was queen bug. She was to lay eggs on humans. These eggs would then drain the humans of their life-forces and hatch into more bug-like warriors for his army. Her thorax glowed and from between her mandible, she'd spit her eggs at

unsuspecting people. They were maybe the size of a baseball, but once attached, a web-like cocoon would form around the egg and tendrils would wrap around their victims, leaching their life force.

The humans instinctively tried to run from this process. If it weren't for the Putty Patrol holding them steady, she may have lost some of her babies. She couldn't handle that. She looked around her at all her eggs feeding off people and cooed. "Rock-a-by babies," she trilled. "More humans for my babies!" she shouted at the Putties. "Don't eat my babies!" she said shrilly at a Tenga Warrior who was trying to do just that.

The Tengas squawked at her in agitation. "I said no!" she said and shot a molten gob of something disgusting at one of them. It stuck and the Tenga burst into flames. The other little clutch huddled together and squawked at her fearfully.

The Putties rounded up a few more victims for her, so she forgot the Tengas temporarily. Her thorax began to glow. She started spitting the eggs out but they never made it to their intended victims. They were blasted out the sky by multicolored blaster shots. She turned to see seven Power Rangers holding Power Blasters. "You killed my babies!" she shouted. "Putties attack!"

"Billie, analyze those things attached to the people, see if they can be safely removed," femme Red told her. She holstered her Blaster and summoned her weapon. "Power Sword!"

"Right," femme Blue agreed. She took cover and made her holographic computer appear and began to analyze the egg sacks attached to the hapless victims.

"Do your little trick, cover her, cover us and cover Taran in case Win shows up," male Black told Silver. He holstered his Blaster and summoned his weapon. "Power Scythe!"

"Right," Silver agreed and split himself into three. It was easier now than it had been the first time but he could only multiply himself twice. Billy was working on figuring out why. One of them went to cover Blue as she analyzed the eggs. He kept his Blaster handy and blasted any Putty that got too close since only one of them at a time could wield the CeratoSword.

Pink and Yellow holstered their Blasters and summoned their weapons.

"Power Fans!"

"Power Grips!"

Pink whirled, spun, kicked, and occasionally her helmet front would pop open so she could knock back a Putty with her shriek before kicking it firmly in the Z. Yellow zoomed through, taking off chunks of clay-like hide before returning with a solid blow to the Z.

Green and Gold holstered their Blasters and summoned their weapons.

"Power Staff!"

"StegoMace!"

"CeratoSword!" One of the Silvers summoned his weapon and jumped into the clutch of Tenga Warriors. He was frankly getting sick of dealing with them.

"Head's up. Nathan's on his way," Tai informed them mere moments before the male Pink Ranger arrived. He was just in tiger kick a Putty trying to sneak up on his partner.

"Ugh, stupid things. Thanks for having me back," she said.

"Any time," he assured her. "Power Bow!" he jumped, levitated and began laying down cover fire.

"Watch out!" Rei's warning was unnecessary as Gold ducked, making the male Green Ranger soar over his head rather than landing the kick to it. He swung around, his hands morphing into long glove covered claws. He rushed forward, slashing at the Gold Ranger.

"This is so bad," Rei murmured. She'd only just managed to get away from the Youth Center. When they saw her, the Tenga Warriors converged. "Drat!" she summoned a staff and attempted to defend herself. "Try to subdue him!" she called to Gold.

"I'll give it my best shot," he muttered. He allowed his own hands to grow into the claws. "Old man Jenkins' grouchy old bull was tearing up my Pa's cornfield one day. Let me show you how I handled that," he said and let his StegoMace disappear. He jumped at Green. The two of them grappled. Even he could tell that the other man was juiced more than usual.

Annoyed by everything, Buggle-Boo attempted to spit eggs at the Rangers. One almost connected to the femme Yellow but her partner appeared just in time to blast it.

"Ew, that would have been so gross," she complained.

"The rest of us are on our way. Officials are calling a recess due to the battle," Tai said.

"We could use the help," femme Red said and decided it was time to distract the monster. She ran forward and swung her sword. Buggle-Boo blocked with one of her blade-like arms.

"You don't understand a mother's love for her children. You weren't hugged enough as a child," Buggle-Boo spat.

"I was hugged plenty," she responded and swung again. The monster blocked. They exchanged a volley of blows and blocks.

"Need help?" the male Red and the rest of the Rangers arrived.

"Thanks," she said. He nodded and drew his Sword and went after the monster. She proved to be a formidable opponent.

"I got it! The eggs are all connected to her. If we get her, they'll die," femme Blue suddenly announced.



Buggle-Boo suddenly shot molten snot globs at the Red Rangers, knocking them back with explosive force. Other teams ran up to engage the monster but were met with similar fates.

"Easier said than done, apparently," male Blue remarked. He sweep kicked a Putty and jabbed his Power Lance into it's Z.

Female Black clobbered a Tenga Warrior that got a little too close to her with the Power Axe. "Ugh, they're so nasty," she grumbled. She shrieked when two more grabbed her. She made herself to heavy for them. Her partner ran up and quickly used his blade to make feathers fly.

Gold and male Green were still grappling.

Two newcomers were watching the fight. Griff glanced at his sister. "Are you absolutely sure?" he asked.

"I need him to have his magic. If saving the Green Ranger is a side-effect, so be it," she said. She made a piece of parchment appear in her hands. She'd researched this spell for years and wrote it out in painstaking detail.

Griff snorted. "Right. Just a side-effect, huh?" he asked.

She smacked him. "Be quiet, I'm concentrating," she said. Suddenly the paper burst into flames and was a pile of ashes in moments. She raised her hands and blew the ashes toward the Gold and Green Ranger fight.

Gold had finally got a upper hand on Green, flipping him over and pinning him. He raised a hand to hopefully knock him out but his world suddenly went sideways and the spell Rei had been trying to teach him flared to life in his hand. Without hesitated he smashed the white energy into the Green Ranger's chest.

The resulting shock-wave of force meets force knocked everyone off their feet, friend and enemy alike, except the twins, who were far enough away. There was silence until Winter's morph failed and he began gasping for breath, his skin crawling with exoskeleton patches. Rei regained her feet and ran over to them. "We have to get him to the Medi-lab, now!" she said. Gold nodded and teleported the three of them.

The female Green watched them go, but she knew they needed her help here. She saw the the duo nearby. They gave her sardonic waves before disappearing.

"Now! While she's down!" the male Red said as he got to his feet. "Mega Power Cannon!" Six Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon. The male Red Ranger aimed the Cannon. "Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger. Six points of energy swirled into the monster and exploded through her. The monster exploded.

Egg sacks began to shrivel up and fall off as people began waking up.

In the Medi-lab Rei was bossing Taran around like a general. "We have to pull the toxins out. If we can stabilize the mutation here and now, he'll make it," she said. "Hold your hands over his chest," she said. Following her lead, he did just that. She put her hands on top of his. She linked their magical energy. Wisps of dark, dense black energy began to seep from his very being and congeal into an oily ball of magic. Win stopped gasping and shaking after a while and fell unconscious.

Kat and Billy were nearby. Both were trained in medicine, they were monitoring Win's vitals. Billy hissed. "A lot of damage has been done to his internal organs, not to mention the changes in his DNA," he said.

"The changes to his DNA is what's going to keep him alive," Taran said, his voice strained as he continued to pull Widow's magic out of his comrade. Finally, Winter's vitals stabilized. Floating above him was a basketball sized sphere of black magic. "Now what do we do with that?" he asked.

"Neutralize and destroy," Rei answered. "Direct your energy at it," she instructed. Taran nodded and did just that. In time the oily ball began to shrink, turn gray until finally it popped out of existence. The two of them staggered back, breathing heavily.

"He's going to be OK," Kat said as she studied the readouts they were getting now. "But you too look exhausted. Both of you, into beds. Now," she ordered. When they tried to protest, she overrode them. Finally they relented.

-x-

Buggle-Boo came back together and grew enormous. "I will destroy everything like you destroyed my babies!" she crowed. She began spitting globs of molten spit that destroyed anything they landed on.

"I think I'm too nauseated to drive the Zord," female Black said, feeling queasy at the disgusting monster.

"Don't worry. I got this. We ready, fearless leader?" male Black called.

"More than," male Red agreed. "TyrannoZord!"

"MastoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"PteroZord!"

"SaberZord!"

Silver had recombined. "I have this. Go," he told female Green. She gave him a grateful nod and teleported to the Command Center to check on her brother. "CeratoZord!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The male Red, female Blue (much to her surprise), male Black, male Pink, and female Yellow.

The silver CeratoZord appeared, a small armed dino with a strong tail. Silver was teleported to a cockpit.

"Activating Megazord Configuration," he said and pressed the red button. The Zords began assembling together. The SaberZord and the MastroZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The CeratoZord broke apart to form armor, a helmet and the tail compressed, flattening into a giant version of the CeratoSword. The pilots appeared in the shared cockpit. "Legendary CeratoMegazord!"

"Let's put this mama bug out of her misery," Yellow said. They were knocked back and their consoles sparked when the bug hocked a molten spit-wad at them.

Blue was using the internal computer to analyze the giant mother bugger. "We have to get her in the abdomen," she said as they were rock again. Every time they swung the CeratoSword, the big bug would use her arms to block and counter-attack. She grimaced and took control of her arm. The TriceraZord's three horns suddenly stood and with a short jab, they sunk into the abdomen of the bug. Her console nearly shorted out as black molten gunk covered the arm eroding it slightly. The Megazord stumbled back.

"Ohh, girl, Holly's gonna kill you," Yellow said.

Red gave a grim smile under his helmet. "It's the opening we needed though."

Silver nodded. "CeratoSword Quicksilver Slash!" The Megazord powered forward and slashed th with the CeratoSword several times then jumped aside. There was a pause, then all the slash marks riddling Buggle-Boo began to glow as she slowly slid apart before exploding.

"The Putties and Tenga are cleared out," Pink said, looking below them.

"And we have a tournament to get back to," Red acknowledged.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow seethed. "How did it happen?" she demanded, her voice echoing through the halls. "How did he break the spell binding his magic? Grandmother bound his magic herself!" she ranted. Her grandmother Arachnea was one of the most powerful sorceresses in all existence.

Roki watched her rant. He was deeply troubled but he didn't understand why she was so upset. She turned toward him. "You don't understand, do you?" she asked.

"Forgive my ignorance, my love," he said.

"He has the magic powers of my family but he is good. Do you know what kind of long reaching consequences that could have? The last sorcerer with that kind of good magic spent thousands of years in a tube and when his power was released, turned half the galaxy's best do-badders into do-gooders including your mother," she hissed.

Roki felt ill. "Oh," he said. "But if your grandmother cast the spell, then how could have broken it?" he asked.

"He couldn't. Not alone and not even with that person's help." Widow brooded. She stormed off to find Lammy and Grifforzer eating again. They looked up when she stormed in. "What did you do?" she demanded of them.

They looked at her blankly. "Do?" they asked.

"Don't be cute with me. You two arrive on the same day as Tarantules' magical binds are undone. Do you take me for a fool?" she demanded.

"You are anything but a fool, Widow," Lammy assured her. "Judge me. Do I have the power to undo one of grandmother's spells?" she asked.

Widow narrowed her eyes. It was true. She did not sense that Lammy had that kind of power. Griff had even less. She turned on her heels and left them. She'd get to the bottom of this somehow.

Lammy watched her go and popped a piece of meat into her mouth.

"So how did you do it?" Griff asked.

"I don't have the power to undo grandmother's spells but I could poke a hole in it long enough for Tarantules' own power to do it," she answered and stood. She stretched. "I'm turning in. It's been a long day," she said and walked off.

Griff grunted. He finished his meal and retired as well. He was awakened some hours later by someone entering his room uninvited. "Zita?" he asked.

His question was met with a giggle. "Shh. Not quite and we don't want to wake her either. She is not going to be pleased to see me, I can tell you that," said the wicked little voice.

He was not awake enough for this. "Then who are you? What do you want?"

The girl, who looked an awful lot like Zita to him, except her hair was shorter, moved toward him. "My name is Moriko but you can call me whatever you want. I need your help. You can't let her destroy me when she discovers me," she said. There was apprehension in her face but no real fear.

"And, what do I get in return for my protection?" he asked, raising a brow.

Moriko grinned now and leaned so close to him their lips nearly touched. "Whatever you want."

-x-

For the next two days the Karate tournament went on. In the end, Ringo Fukinawa was defeated by Rex rather than Tai because of how the tournament matches were laid out. Rex also walked away from the

Tournament with his first karate trophy. First place in his class. The match against Tai was so close, during the final round when they knocked each other out of bounds, the judges declared Rex a winner because his feet connected half a second before Tai's.

He put in the Command Center and pointed at it. "No more guff about me not competing."

Once Winter had stabilized, they moved him to Angel Grove General so that his family could visit him. The official story was he was on his way home when he was caught in an accident caused by the latest monster attack. He was still unconscious but no one expected him to bounce back too quickly.

Autumn filled Taran and Rei in about the golden garbed figures she saw. It was perplexing but perhaps not their biggest worry. When she wasn't rushed trying to save Winter's life, Rei figured out that there had been a binding spell on Taran.

"I should have realized sooner. There was no way they wanted you running around with access to your magic after you were caught in the Z-wave," she said, shaking her head at herself.

Taran wasn't sure about this whole magic business but if it helped then it helped.

They could use all the help they could get because Widow was sure to be furious now.

-xThe End Chapter 10x-

## 11 - Brighter than the Sun

Winter had awakened at the hospital to find a nurse with a blond bob hovering over him. He'd later learned it was Beta Z making sure none of the staff at AG General discovered his new peculiarities. He'd had a precession of visitors from family to friends. He felt a twinge of guilt when he saw Fox's arm, but Autumn literally smacked some sense into him. He didn't think people were supposed to abuse hospital patients.

He was still having trouble speaking but Taran assured him it was temporary, just part of all the damage Widow had done to his insides. Other things she did to his insides are what will actually keep him alive and heal him. It'd just take time. He was already noticing some of it. At random moments his hearing would make even a fly buzzing around near deafening. When Beez would draw his blood, the small puncture would heal nearly instantly. So he was getting a taste of what it was like to be Taran.

He didn't like it.

He was awakened from a doze by the sound of a heartbeat. It wasn't Beez. Though she surprisingly had a heartbeat, there was a difference in the way it sounded from a normal heartbeat. This one reminded him of Taran, which again was slightly different than a human's. He cracked his eyes, expected to be blinded by the lighting but the lights were off and the blinds were closed. Sitting in a chair beside his bed was someone definitely not Taran.

Lammy lounged wearing purple cowboy boots with yellow, orange and turquoise stitching over stone-washed jeans and a tan leather vest for a top. Her hair hung loose and free. "What doin' here?" he asked and cleared his throat. It was dry and he reached for a glass of water.

She sat up and handed it to him. "Nothing bad. In fact I'm helping," she answered. He gave her a skeptical expression. "It's true. Look, I'll prove it," she said. She reached over and pulled a coin from behind his ear, making him jump slightly. His eyes widened when he saw the coin. "It's authentic. We took it off an arms dealer we tracked a year or so ago. I've done a few tests on it. It's Earth origin. I bet if you ask that spiffy little computer girl of yours, she'll confirm," she explained and handed him the coin.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why what, darlin'? I know Widow did a number on your insides but you can be more specific than that," she said, imitating Taran's Kansas twang perfectly.

"Why help?" Winter reiterated. He wasn't sure what to think of her, but she sure was fascinating.

She shrugged. "Not out of the goodness of my heart, I assure you. My plans and Widow's plans don't quite line up. Widow wants Taran erased from existence and I need his help. Earning a few brownie points can't be amiss, especially for what I have planned next. He's going to owe me big when the time comes for me collect. Don't frown. I'm not into *World Domination*," she said, deepening her voice in a mocking way for the last two words.

She sniffed when he still looked skeptical. "Think what you will, but he'll repay his debts," she looked toward the door and quickly changed shapes into a small gold scorpion that scuttled under his bed.

Autumn and Taran walked into the room carrying bags of food. It had been hard for him to tell Autumn that what she had been bringing him wasn't enough. Taran had sheepishly confirmed that he ate a lot more food than he let most people see. Autumn had rolled her eyes and muttered something unflattering about men under her breath.

"You look chipper," Autumn said as she began to unpack the food. Taran, however, was suddenly on high alert. They weren't alone. He gave Win a questioning look.

Win grinned and pointed under his bed. Taran raised a brow. He took Win's now empty water glass and lowered himself to the floor. "What on Earth?" Autumn asked, noticing his activity.

Taran came back up with a small scorpion trapped between the glass and his hand. "Not quite Earth," he said. Autumn squeaked when the scorpion turned into a tiny blond woman.

Lammy rapped on the glass. "Let me out of here," she said and gave the glass a kick. She turned toward Winter. "You wienie. You told him where I was, didn't you?" she demanded. She turned her back to both men, crossed her arms over her chest and huffed peevisly.

"Now what is she doing here?" Taran asked Winter.

"Helping," Winter said and held up the Power Coin. Autumn gasped again and went to her brother. She took the Coin.

"See, I came in peace. You have no right to--agh!" while she was talking, Taran tipped her out of the glass. She landed full-sized on the floor. "Ouch. I thought you were the good one. That hurt," she grumbled and got to her feet. "What are you grinning about? I won't forget this," she said to Winter. She disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Was that a good idea? Letting her go I mean?" Autumn asked, turning the Coin around in her hand a few times.

"Wants to help. Needs Taran's help. Helped me," Winter answered. "Says she help again. Big," he added, wondering what she meant by that.

"Help big? What does that mean?" Autumn wondered out loud.

"I don't know but I think it's best not to underestimate her. I don't think whatever it is could be bad for us, though. Here, I'll take that to Beez at the Command Center. You stay and feed your brother," Taran said and took the Coin from her. Autumn nodded. Taran teleported. Winter ate his meal feeling better than he had in quite some time.

## Palace on the Moon

Roki awakened to the sound of women shrieking. He stood and dressed himself. Widow was behind him. "Is that your sister?" she asked. They heard another scream and what sounded like an energy explosion. They hurried to the main hall where they found Zita preparing another blast. Griff stood in front of a woman with short hair. His armor was smoking and he had his mace out.

"Out of my way!" Zita ordered him. "I'm going to stop this nuisance now!"

Griff shook his head. "Moriko is no threat to you," he said.

Roki rubbed his forehead. "What is going on?" he demanded of his sister.

Moriko spotted Roki and brightened. "Don't let her kill me, okay? I'm not Good. I swear," she pleaded. It was true. She wasn't Good. She wasn't exactly Evil either but she wasn't going to go into that just then.

"Then what are you? And for that matter, what is Rei?" Widow asked and walked over to Griff. She made him lower his mace. "No one's going to kill her," she assured him.

"I think we're triplets. Something happened when we were children and we weren't anymore," Moriko answered and stepped from around Griff, confident now that she wasn't going to have to battle Zita. She stood on her tiptoes and kissed his cheek as a thank you.

"I don't remember having any other sisters," Roki said, narrowing his eyes.

Moriko shook her head. "And Zita never remembered being a triplet. Obviously some powerful magic was in use. What does it all mean? Beats me," she said, lying about the last part easily. It wasn't time for Roki to know and Zita was so not ready to hear it all. While Griff was keeping her presence quiet, she'd sought out Rei. She, at least, knew what was happening and she understood that Zita needed her near until it was time.

"Obviously," Widow murmured thoughtfully. "Zita, dear, put away that energy ball. I believe that she isn't Good," she said.

Zita closed her hand and the energy disbursed. "We'll see about that," she said.

"Maybe she could prove herself," Lammy suggested. She'd been watching the show since she heard the commotion. She didn't know the significance of the triplets but she was willing to bet it was something big if someone had tried to merge them into one being. She watched her brother's protective stance and almost smirked. She even had feeling she knew the thing that broke the spell.

This was all the better for her. If Moriko could distract Widow, Roki and Zita, no one would be paying attention to her.

Moriko brightened. "Yes! I'll make a monster and devise a plan for the Power Rangers. In fact," she said and tapped her lip, "it might be time to use that shiny red jewel of yours," she told Roki.



Roki stiffened. "My Red Orb?" he demanded.

"Well, isn't it perfect? I'll make a skeletal monstrosity and we can infuse it with the power of the Red Orb, which is Tarantules' power," she said and tried not to smirk when she saw the gleam in Widow's eye. This was definitely happening.

"That's actually quite ingenious," Widow said thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed it is," Lammy agreed. She swallowed. It might be a little too ingenious.

She glanced at her twin. Griff didn't say much but he raised his brow at her. She smiled. She didn't fill him in on her plan. He understood it was for his own protection but didn't like the thought of her going on a dangerous solo mission. He knew what she was thinking, though. They were going to have to say good-bye soon.

"Then I'll go get started with Finster. Zita, would you like to join me?" she asked.

Zita eyed her with a tight expression. "I suppose I can always keep an eye on you," she said. The two of them walked off in wary silence with Griff following close behind Moriko.

Widow watched them go then glanced at Lammy. Her little sister gave her a smile and walked off to the library. That girl was forever reading books.

Roki sighed and rubbed his forehead. "I'm getting a headache," he said. Widow reached up and rubbed his temples. He smiled blissfully. "Do I really need to give up my Orb?" he asked.

"Only if you wish it," she said. "But it would be a powerful tool against the Rangers," she said.

Roki sighed and leaned down to kiss her. "Then we have some preparations to make. To the lab," he said. He swept her off with him.

-x-

Nathan and Tori were having a pink day. They'd gone shopping. They were giggling together about seeing Adam and Trini having a picnic in the park as they walked through with their shopping bags. "They're so cute," Tori commented as they made their way to the Youth Center.

They were caught off guard by a smartly dressed black woman with caramel curls. She nearly ambushed them. "Hi, Aisha Campbell with the *Angel's Herald*. Can I get a couple of questions from the newest Pink Rangers?" she asked.

Nathan and Tori blinked.

Aisha couldn't help but giggle at their expressions. "Oh, come on. I won't use any names. I'm a reporter and my sources are protected by law," she promised.

Tori shook her head. "She's one of us," she told Nathan, who still looked slightly panicked.

Nath sighed in relief. "Oh. Er..no comment," he said.

"I was afraid of that," Aisha said and grinned. She'd already checked in with Billy. He'd warned her that it probably wasn't a good idea to try and get quotes from the new Rangers but she'd decided to give it her best shot. "Well, let's go in. My treat for the ambush," she said. "I was actually looking for my two," she said. Aisha Campbell, formerly Yellow Smilodon Ranger, Yellow Zeo Ranger and Yellow Turbo Ranger, was excited to meet Wood and Manny.

"Your two?" Nathan asked. So he wasn't up on his Ranger history.

"She means Wood and Manny," Tori explained.

"Oh, well, I'm meeting Wood here," Nath said helpfully. "Don't know about Manny, though," he added apologetically.

Aisha gave him a smile and the trio went inside. They lead her to a booth where Wood sat with Danny and Billie. Wood beamed when he saw Aisha and got to his feet. "Oh, sweet. You're Aisha Campbell," he said. "I'm Wood Johnson," he said excitedly and took her hand.

Aisha laughed. "It's great to meet you. I don't supposed you'd agree to answer a few questions as a confidential source?" she asked.

"I don't know," Wood said, giving it some serious thought.

"She's pullin' ya leg," Danny said. Billie snorted.

Tori sighed. She left the little group and sat down next to Chloe. Her friend grinned, "What's wrong? Put out because Wood didn't see you through the glow of yellow?" she asked.

"Shut up," Tori said.

Chloe snickered, knowing she hit the nail on the head just then. "Look. Win's back," she said and pointed to where he was taking orders at the counter and relaying them to someone else. He'd occasionally rub his forehead but otherwise he was quiet. Tori brightened considerably and a new smile formed on her face. That was better news than a brief spurt of petty jealousy.

-x-

Taran had quite a few things on his mind, the least of which was not his Reavers. He rubbed his neck. He was definitely going to have to get off Tori and Dawn Feather's couch soon. He didn't think his neck was going to be able to take much more. He headed through the hotel hall toward the Reavers' suite. He idly heard the phone ringing. He heard someone pick it up then an uproar started that quickened his pace.

As he entered the suite, jubilation hit him full force. "What the heck is goin' on?" he demanded.

Fey was holding the phone. "It's Teague! Teague! Taran's here!" she said and handed him the phone as she bounced around reminding him oddly of Tori. Taran rather suspected that for all Fey's love voo-doo, she had a major crush on their Commander Memphis Teague.

"Teague?" he asked, putting the receiver to his ear and preemptively turning his hearing down.

A big black man even larger than Shaquil O'Neal, Teague had a voice that matched. "Tar'n? That yo boi?" he asked, his blaring voice thick with southern Louisiana.

"It's me. I'm not the one that got blown up in the ship and has been missing for three months," he said in a scolding tone.

"Don' yo go and patronize me, boi. I ain't been able to speak to nobody. I been down here on my gran-mammy's land recov'in' from being blowed straight to Ol' Scratch hisself. When I was well 'enough, I mang'ed to get holt of Casey and find yaw. Now, what yaw's been doin'. Wha' happened?" he demanded. Teague's grandmother, it was rumored, was known as Queen Marie, a famous voo-doo priestess. No one who'd ever met Teague doubted that. She owned a patch of swampland in Louisiana.

Taran rubbed his ear before explaining about Widow. All eyes were on him as he spoke to Memphis. Finally, after a few deafening explosions from the man, Memphis told him the good news. "The Command Ship has been rebuilt. Now alls yaw gotta do is find Solaria and free her and we back in b'ness," he pointed out.

"We're doing the best we can, but Teague, Tori and I won't be coming back. We're Power Rangers now and we're needed here," he said. There was a loud silence.

"Undastood, boi, undastood," Teague said and hung up on him. Teague wasn't one for inane pleasantries. Taran hung up the phone. He looked at the Reavers. "You get that?" he asked, knowing Teague's voice could be heard as if he were in the room. They nodded.

"But Taran," Hayden said hesitantly, "how are we going to free Solaria? We don't even know what Widow's done with her," he pointed out.

Taran nodded. He was quiet a moment. "I think I know, but I ain't sure yet," he said. He changed the subject back to the good news, that they had a place to go and that Memphis Teague was still alive.

-x-

Beta Z and Billy were studying the Power Coin they'd been given by Taran's baby sister. Tai wandered over to them. "Well, what's the verdict?" he asked.

"It is indeed one of the stolen coins my father and Zordon created. It is the Velociraptor Coin," she answered.

"Well, what do we do with it now? Find someone to use it?" Tai asked.

"I don't think so. I think, like the Stegosaurus and Ceratosaurus Coins, it found its way into the proper

hands," Beez said thoughtfully.

Billy looked at her in surprise. "You mean Lammy?" he asked.

Beez nodded. Tai leaned against a console and thought about that. "We'll see what her big plan to help is going to be before we go giving some unknown variable a Power Coin," he said.

Billy nodded approvingly. "I agree," he said. They looked at Beez for her opinion.

She quirked a small smile at them. "That is acceptable," she agreed.

Alarms went off and one of the view screens lit up to show Putty Patrollers in the financial district. Another screen lit up to show them in the shopping district. Yet another screen lit up to show them appear on the Angel Grove University campus.

"Ay yi yi!" Beez exclaimed.

"They're trying to divide and conquer. Dr. Bill, is Win ready for action yet?" Tai asked. Win had been discharged from the hospital the day before, but no one was clear on how soon he could be back to action.

Billy nodded. "I believe so. His recovery has been remarkable," he answered.

"Beez, I'll meet Chloe, Nathan, Wood and Taran at the University. Have Lani, Danny, Tori and Autumn head to the financial district. Rex, Billie, Manny, Win and Sora to the shopping district," he said.

"On it, Tai," she said.

He nodded and twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-X-

Angel Grove University was a quiet, idyllic, small-town type of University with a rolling green campus with a variety of buildings and businesses catering to the students. It wasn't that far away from the city center where the Youth Center was located and that's why they got a fair amount of college kids in and out as well.

It was also a pretty good target for the Putty Patrol to cause a little chaos. There were a few students that could defend themselves, as there was a healthy bout of martial arts competitions among the college students, but for the most part, Putties appearing were terrifying. A small group chased down a couple of screaming co-eds.

Black, Pink and Yellow laser blasts hit the Putties as the female Black, male Pink and male Yellow Rangers arrived. "Don't worry, citizens, the Power Rangers are here to defeat this Evil," Yellow announced, deepening his voice to sound more grown-up.

"Get away, quickly," Black told them and started shooting at more Putties, moving away from the girls

now that they were safe.

"I got you guys covered from above," Pink said and ran forward and jumped into the air. "Power Bow!" he summoned.

The male Red and Gold Ranger arrived. They didn't get a chance to dive into the Putties. Gold tackled Red and pulled him to safety just as a crater opened up where he'd been standing.

Red whistled. "I gotta get me some spidy senses," he said. "Thanks," he told Gold as they got to their feet.

Gold shrugged. "There," he said and pointed. Zita was confidently making her way toward them, another energy blast in her hands. "I'm beginning to see why you annoy Widow so much," Zita said to Gold.

Gold shrugged. "Brothers annoy their sisters. It's just how it is," he said in a blasé manner. "StegoMace!" he summoned his weapon.

Red drew his blade from its sheath. Zita smirked and crushed the energy ball in her hand. "We can do this the old fashioned way if you like," she suggested.

Red smiled slightly beneath his helmet. "Handle her. I'll help the others," he said, surprising her. She tried to lunge after him but found Gold in her way. She made a long sound of rage and made her body armor and helmet appear. She flew at Gold but he met her head on.

Red sliced his way through Putties. "How are you guys doing?" he asked.

"We're good, just Putties, no monsters. Taran has the hard job," Black said and nodded to where the two were trading blows. "Power Axe!" she summoned her axe and went after Putties like a lumber jack.

Red nodded. "Don't get too complacent. Just because the monster hasn't appeared yet doesn't mean there isn't one," he said.

"We're on high alert," Yellow assured him. "Power Daggers," he summoned the daggers and leapt over under attack college kids and stabbed Putties with his daggers. As well as basic karate, he'd also been training how to effectively use his given weapons. All his hard work was beginning to show.

"Is that some kind of dig?" Pink asked, slightly amused. A Putty jumped and grabbed his leg bringing him down with a yell and a crash. He dropped his bow, but his lessons weren't for nothing either. He was already in top physical shape because of his gymnastics training, so he'd taken well to his karate lessons. He quickly tipped the scales on the Putty, flipping him and driving the palm of his hand into the Z. He rolled to his feet and back-flipped a few times.

Black giggled. "You and Rex better watch out, you might have some competition on Hard-core Male Ranger of the Year," she told Red.

"I'm not in a competition but for a second there I wondered if Rex was somehow in the Pink suit," Red answered. Yellow almost got his head knocked off when he started laughing.

"Glad to see ya'll having so much fun," Gold panted as he jumped back as Zita began using energy balls in frustration.

"You're the one with newly tapped magical powers. Throw one back at her," Red said.

"Oh, yeah," Gold said. He formed an energy ball in his hand and tossed it at her.

She shrieked and rolled out of the way. "Guess it's time to play hardball, huh," she said with a cold air. Something dark and dangerous formed in her hand.

"Everyone down!" Gold yelled as she threw it. He barely managed to get his Mace up in time. The area around them exploded.

-X-

The financial district was where all the suits liked to work that dealt with money. There were several bank headquarters, a good deal of offices buildings and a lot of people milling around. Perfect for the Putty Patrol to terrorize and make the stock market go haywire. People in high dollar power suits were fleeing for their lives.

Putties were smashing out bank windows. It was pandemonium. Red, Green, Blue and Pink laser blasts caught a few made them disintegrate. The female red, male Blue, female Pink and female Green Ranger had appeared. "This does not bode well for Ma's 401K," Blue commented.

"There aren't as many I thought there'd be," Red said uneasily. "Power Sword!" she said, summoning her weapon. "Be alert," she said and began to take out Putties.

"Power Lance!" Blue summoned his weapons. "Don't worry, I'm alert," he promised.

"Power Fans," Pink summoned her fans. "I'm with Lani, something's off," she said as she began spinning through Putties, occasionally popping her helmet open to scream at them.

Green looked around. Putty Patrollers didn't have auras per se since they weren't technically alive, but her ability could sometimes allow her to read the atmosphere and something dark and blood red hovered at the edge of her vision. "Power Staff!" she summoned. "The atmosphere is bad. Very, very bad; beyond just a few Putties," she said as she took out several.

"I'll call for back-up but we may be on our own for awhile," Red declared wondering what Autumn was seeing that she couldn't.

"We ain't lightweights, are we Tor? We can handle it for awhile," Blue said.

"That's right," Pink agreed.

Red nodded and activated her communicator. "Beez, keep an eye on our location and send us back-up whenever you can. I think things are about to get real bad, real fast," she said.

"Affirmative, Lani. We are monitoring all locations," Beez responded.

"Thanks," Red said half a second before she did the splits in an effort to dodge a Putty's blow. She thrust up with her sword nailing him in the Z.

Someone laughed. Widow and Roki appeared. "Perhaps Zita kidnapped the wrong Green Ranger. This one is a lot more perceptive and brighter than her brother," Widow commented to her husband.

"A lot cuter, too," Roki said. Her annoyed expression was just as he hoped.

"Don't bring me into your marital problems," Green said placing her feet in an offensive stance.

Widow smirked. Her black and silver armor appeared. Roki's blood red armor appeared. "Come on then, let's have your vengeance," she prompted Green.

"Autumn!" Red said but it was too late. Green was already running at Widow. She swung with her staff but the dark witch blocked with one of her armor blades. Green kept advancing, each time, Widow blocked. She swung around and landed a kick to the Green Ranger's middle.

"I'm not some wilting daisy hiding up on my throne because I can't defend myself," she said.

"Neither am I," Roki said and drew a sword that was similar to the Power Sword but its blade was as red as his armor.

"I think me and you can take him," Blue told Red, She nodded. Together they attacked. Roki, however, was not boasting. He handled his blade well, taking on the two of them with tremendous skill.

"Guess I'll be helping you," Pink said to Green and jumped, landing in front of Widow, who was expecting an attack from the fans but instead her helmet popped open and she let out a sonic screech that managed to knock her off her feet. She barely had a moment to right herself before Green advanced again with the Staff only for Pink to come from the other side with her Fans.

Not that either of them were going to play fair. As soon as it became apparent neither was getting the upper hand in normal combat, they resorted to throwing magic around. Sudden blasts knocked the four Rangers away. They landed near each other and got to their feet ready to try again but Roki and Widow were already sending a combined dark energy blasts at them that took out half the street.

-X-

A loop of strip malls, department stores, big box chains and trendy high-end boutiques was normally a bevy of hustle and bustle in Angel Grove. It was no different now. Except this time, Putty Patrollers decided to attack. One group of industrious Putties was playing around in a high-end dress shop and entertaining themselves by trying on a mish-mash of cute skirts, trendy tops and elegant dresses while the terrified shop girls left them to it.

The Rangers were too surprised to even shoot at them. The male Black, female Blue, female Yellow,

male Green and Silver Rangers had their Blasters at the ready but hadn't quite fired yet.

"What on Earth are they doing?" Blue said.

"I guess Putties want to feel pretty too," Black answered.

"I am never shopping here again," Yellow declared and started firing. The others joined her, effectively eliminating them and calling attention to their appearance.

Other Putties began to converge on them. "You good for this?" Silver asked Green.

"Good," Green answered. Even though most of his more serious problems were gone, he still had problems speaking. "Stygian Dagger!" he managed to summon. His body moved better than he could ever remember it moving. But there was also the drawback of him literally not knowing his own strength. He put himself in peril a couple of times by mis-estimating what he was doing.

Once he stabbed a Putty so hard in the chest that his own strength kept him going and he face-planted. Putties were trying to converge on him, but Rei appeared and took them out with her staff. She'd learned to handle it fairly quickly. "You okay?" she asked.

"Good," he answered and got to his feet.

"Almost wish I had a camera for that," Black said. He'd summoned his Power Scythe and was cutting through the Putty Patrol.

"I'm pretty sure you shouldn't make fun of him," Yellow scolded him. She sped through the Putties with her Power Grips.

"I think it's refreshing watching someone else land face-first," Blue declared. She blinked in and out confusing the Putties when she'd suddenly disappear only to reappear in a different place to hit, kick or stab one of them.

"You sure you don't still fall down, just turning invisible so we can't tell?" Black asked. Yellow snickered.

"You aren't funny enough to be a comedian," Blue said and tossed a Power Sai that stabbed a Putty coming up behind him.

Green merely shook his head. He wasn't discouraged by their teasing. He was just glad he wasn't being pitied or babied.

Silver grinned under his helmet. "I think she just made her point," he said to Black. He had is CeratoSword

"Literally," Rei agreed.

Green suddenly felt a sharp tingling sensation and jerked around just before a large mace nearly took his head off. "Griff," he said, surprised.



Griff gave him a grin. "Decided to see how you were holding up," he said lazily and propped the mace on his shoulder. Moriko came up behind him. She was smiling as if amused.

Silver stiffened. Rei had told him about meeting her last sister. Rei watched warily. "What are you doing here?" she demanded.

Moriko gave a negligent shrug. "Earning my evil stripes," she answered.

"And him?" Silver asked, eying Griff.

Griff shrugged. "I just came to play," he answered. It was true in a sense. He'd actually been taxed with making sure the Green Wienie got back on his feet. He was willing to oblige his sister. Besides, she'd told him, it'd look better for him afterwards if he was seen attacking the Rangers.

Black stepped forward but Green shook his head. "Got this," he said.

"And I'll handle her," Rei said.

"Handle me? How quaint," Moriko said, the grin stretching across her face.

More Putties appeared to attack the other Rangers. Silver split himself into three to handle the extra load.

"Neat trick. I'll try it!" Moriko declared and her form shimmered, making two more of her appear. Her true self appeared a staff in which she began to fight Rei with. Griff had taught her how to defend herself, including using a staff. She was pretty good at it.

The other two Morikos made staffs appear as well. One decided to play with the Silver with the CeratoSword and the other cornered Black.

Griff attacked Green again. This time he was ready and deflected with his Dagger. Griff seemed to get more aggressive as his body began to grow accustomed to it's new abilities. It seemed what he'd needed was the right sparring partner. He couldn't tell if Griff was determined to knock his head off or not, but he was determined not to let him.

"I get the feeling we're not very high on their radar," Yellow said to Blue.

"All the better if you ask me," Blue said.

Suddenly, the three Morikos came back to one. "Griff," she said. He stopped trying to knock Winter's head off and went to her side.

"Brace!" Rei called and stepped forward with the armed Silver Ranger just as Moriko let loose a wild volley of energy blasts.

## Palace on the Moon

It was quiet in the Palace. Goldarr and Scorpina had left to return to their home a few days earlier, satisfied that their missing children were well. Lammy had been in the library. When asked if she wanted to join the fun of attacking the Rangers, she'd refused, her excuse being she'd rather read. Widow had given her a suspicious look but then shrugged and moved on.

Lammy could hear Finster's television and Rito snoring. Only Putties were moving about as they saw to their duties of tidying the Palace. She slipped out of the library after ascertaining that everyone else was indeed on Earth. She knew there would be no denying her guilt and she only had one shot.

Widow might be suspicious of her, but there was no way she could imagine what Lammy had on her mind. She quickly made her way to Widow and Roki's room. She turned in a circle and took a deep breath. This was Widow's anchor, where she felt the most at peace and safe. It was perfect.

Lammy took a deep breath and summoned every ounce of strength she had. She closed her eyes and began to chant and drew a circle over and over in the air. From here she was fairly certain she could poke a small hole into the pocket universe where Widow kept things. She had one shot once the hole was open. Widow would know as soon as the pocket dimension was breached. As she chanted, she the object in mind she was after. She'd seen Widow show it off so many times as a fascinated child, it was burned into her mind.

Her entire body was drenched with sweat. There was a sudden give and without hesitation she stuck her hand into the pocket dimension and wrapped her fingers around the bottle that held Solaria. With a gasp she disappeared.

-x-

Jason was checking in with Beez when the intruder alarms went off. Lammy appeared in the Power Chamber. A containment field went up around her immediately. She fell to her knees panting for breath. She held up her arms, one hand still clutching the bottle containing Solaria. "Peace," she gasped, still struggling to catch her breath.

Jason squatted down to look at her. "How did you even get in here?" he asked.

"Tracked. Power Coin. Tagged," she answered.

Beez picked up the Coin and turned it around in her hand. "Dropping containment field," she said. She walked over to Lammy and knelt down as well. She placed it in her hand. "It is the Velociraptor Coin," she informed her.

Jason watched in surprise at Beez's actions.

Lammy frowned, finally able to breath again. "What do I care that it's a Velociraptor--" whatever she was going to say next was cut off by the Coin dissolving into her palm and pale gold cuffs appearing around her wrists. "Oh, no, no, no, no," she denied and got to her feet, shaking her head. "I am not a Power

Ranger," she said flatly.

Jason smiled in bemusement as he stood as well. "Sure looks like it to me," he said despite her vehemently shaking her head. Beez nodded and took the bottle of the sleeping goddess away from her. There would be time for that later.

-X-

The male Blue Rangers forcefield were the only things that saved he and his comrades from Widow and Roki's combined attack, and even then, he'd lost his Morph.

Widow smirked. "I doubt you can withstand that again," she said, already eager to test her theory. Except something happened. She gasped, staggered and grabbed onto Roki for support.

Alarmed, Roki steadied her. "What is it?" he asked.

"Someone broke into my pocket! They took it! They took my firefly!" she shrieked. Her eyes suddenly narrowed in rage. "Lammy," she hissed. She disappeared in a whirlwind of black smoke.

Roki spared a glance for the banged up Rangers. "Don't even begin to think you've gotten away with anything. The worst is yet to come," he warned them and disappeared behind his wife.

Danny staggered but Red and Green were there to hold him up. "You were quite heroic," Pink said.

"Thanks. If what just happened was any indication, I'd hate to be Lammy about now," he said and shook himself. "I'm a'ight. I can stand," he said and moved away from them.

Red stared at where the two villains had been. "I wonder what he meant," she murmured.

"I think we're going to find out," Green said as their communicators came online requesting back-up.

"Danny, can you Morph?" Red asked.

He nodded and twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

-X-

Although Gold's StegoMace absorbed much of Zita's attack, there was still a sizeable crater around them and everyone had lost their morphs.

Zita smirked. She shook her head at them. "How pathetic," she said.

They got to her feet. Tai shook his head at her. "You're the pathetic one. You don't even understand that it's not a powersuit that makes a Power Ranger. It's something they have inside where you're empty," he said. He had no problem talking to evil women.

Zita hissed through her teeth. She stepped back a couple of steps and stared at him. Really studied him

for the first time. Who was he anyway? All this focus on Taran, an obvious threat because of his strength and magical potential but who on Earth was Tai Stapleton? Why was he staring at her as if she was less than nothing and could see right through her? Zita felt an inkling of fear for the first time that she can remember.

She bared her teeth at them. She turned on her heel and disappeared, telling herself that it was because Roki was summoning her and not because she was afraid that he could see everything she was trying to hide.

Chloe was looking at him as if she'd never seen him before.

Tai felt his ears turning red. "What?" he asked sharply.

"Dude, you scared Zita away by staring at her," Wood said.

"Yeah, man. I can't wait to tell Danny and Billie," Nathan said with a grin.

Taran had to admit he was impressed, but he also knew Zita hadn't just left because she was afraid of Tai. Something was going on. Before he could contemplate what, they were called in for back-up.

"Back to action," Tai and twisted his wrists. He wasn't dumb enough to think he'd scared Zita away either. Something was up. "It's Morpin' Time!"

-x-

Rei had managed to throw up a small magical barrier to ward off most of Moriko's attacks but not all and they'd been hit. None of the blast by themselves were powerful enough to cause a morph failure, but they were still smoking and bruised.

Silver was less effected, his CeratoSword taking the brunt of attacks.

"Still standing I see," Moriko said and gave them a smile and clapped her hands together.

Black dusted himself off. "It'll take more than that to get rid of us," he said.

Moriko waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, I know," she said and cocked her head to the side as if listening to something they couldn't hear. She glanced at Griff, who suddenly had a ferocious frown on his face and a white knuckled grip on his mace. She reached out and touched his arm. "We should go," she said. She glanced back at the Rangers. "Oh, and sorry about this but something is about to happen that you'll all like. If you get past the monster," she made a chagrined expression. "I may have gone a little overboard but I have faith in you!" she said and disappeared. Griff gave them a nod and disappeared as well.

"Huh?" Yellow asked, cocking her hip and putting her fist on it.

"Ditto," Blue said and looked at Rei.

Rei cleared her throat when Green, Silver and Black looked at her as well. "So, yeah, that's my last sister, Moriko. She's, um, not exactly an enemy but not exactly an ally either," she explained.

Black sighed. "Any other siblings coming out of the woodwork we should know about?" he asked.

"Just Thrax but he disappeared a few months ago," Rei answered.

"Right," Black said. He was about to call it a day when the earth began to rumble. "Glitch?"

Blue didn't have to use her helmet computer to know that something big was coming. A monster was headed toward them. There was a huge red horse with cracks that seemed to be magma running under its partially blackened skin. Its eyes were red and steam came from its nose. Asphalt cracked and steamed under its molten hoofs. Upon the back of the horse was a skeletal warrior with black bones, blood red armor, and a helmet with obscenely long black bullhorns coming from it. It held a long intricate blade that was even larger than Silver's. One eye was covered with a black eyepatch but the other was a glowing red orb. The Red Reaper Orb.

Yellow crossed herself. And once more for good measure.

"You have got to be kidding me," Black said.

The horse reared and let out a careening neigh. The rider opened its jaw and blasted them with a long fiery flame. They barely had time to get out of way. "Beez! We need everyone here! Now! We can deal with Putties any time. Get them here," Black said into his comm. He felt feel another blast of fire warm the concrete wall he's sought refuge behind. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. If this was Rei's sister not trying to kill them, he'd hate to see what she'd come up with if she were.

The monster laughed. "All bow down to Skelewar," he said in a strangely booming but hollow sounding voice. "I'll rip this puny planet apart and set it ablaze," he declared wildly. He rose his blade over his head as it caught fire. The horse reared again.

Laser blasts hit him from all sides as the rest of the Rangers arrived. Despite its size, the horse appeared to be quite agile. It Spun around as the monster blew fire. Everywhere Power Rangers where diving for cover.

"Holy moly," Red said as he patted himself down to make sure nothing caught fire. All around him, buildings were catching fire.

"Sorry! He's harnessing the power of the Sun for that fire," Gold called out. He'd spotted the orb in the eye socket.

Skelewar laughed. "You've met your match, Rangers," he said.

"Not quite!" a new voice said. From their hiding places, the Power Rangers saw an unknown Ranger walking toward the monster. She was female with a pale gold and white suit. The helmet was pale gold with red eyes. There was a blaster on one hip. She was holding something high in the air.

"Who are you supposed to be?" Skelewar asked, laughing at her.

"I'm the Electrum Velociraptor Ranger but I'm not what you need to be concerned with," she said. She shook the bottle. The being inside began to stir as if sensing she was about to be free.

The horse reared again, this time in fear.

"Solaria," Gold gasped. The Electrum Ranger threw the bottle on the ground. It shattered. The mushroom cloud that erupted threw her out of sight. No one could look directly at the towering flame. There was a sudden shock-wave that rocked them all.

All at once the fire collapsed back in on itself to reveal a shape of a woman with fiery red hair, glittery gold skin, pointed ears, feral gold eyes, a long tail and wearing some of steam-punk looking captain's garb in shades of brown and tan. She waved a hand and all the fires went out.

The earth rumbled. "All right, you cranky old thing, I'm leaving," she said looking down at the ground. "But first," she murmured and held out her hand. Energy began to collect there. Streams of it came from the sky, which had gone dark against her brightness and another from the ground. Ten crystals began to form. She blew on them and they scattered. "Taran, tell your sister I will never forget what she has done. Both of them," she called out and turned into a ball of fire and rocketed up into the sky until she disappeared.

The Rangers stood around gaping. Had they really just seen a goddess? Male Green was the first to recover and ran to find Electrum. She was sitting up in a rut she'd created in the concrete. She shook her head to clear it. "Look out! He still has plenty of power!" she shouted and bounced to her feet. She staggered and Green caught her.

"Helped big," he said, a smile in his voice.

"I told you, but I'm too sure about all this Power Ranger business but that android you guys have was pretty persistent," she complained.

He just nodded. "We have to get back," he said nodding toward the fight. Even though he was no longer powered by the sun, Skelewar's fires were still a force to be reckoned with. The Rangers were doing all they could to get a blaster fire off at him. It was too dangerous to get too close with weapons. The Sword had a long reach and the horse was dangerous as well.

Electrum quirked a small smile. "Divide and conquer," she said. "VelociRapier!" she summoned a long thin bladed sword and began running. She gained speed, running straight at the horse. It startled and reared, she ducked and slid under its massive hooves and used her blade to cut the saddle's strap.

Skelewar gave a ferocious roar as he fell off the horse. The animal bolted, attempting to vanquish the Rangers on its own. Everywhere it stepped the ground cracked and blackened asphalt.

"Mega Power Cannon he crap out of that one and we'll do this one," Gold called to the male Red, eyeing the horse.

"How?" Silver asked.

"These weapons were made for each other," Electrum answered.

Gold nodded. "Alpha Legend Cannon!" Silver Gold and Electrum fit their weapons together to make a cannon with a long nose and a trigger. "Fire!" The nose began to glow, pulsing gold and white, gaining intensity before finally blasting into the horse, which exploded.

"All right people, let's go! Mega Power Cannon!" Red called. Twelve Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon. The male Red Ranger aimed the Cannon. "Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger. Six points of energy swirled and swept through Skelewar. He cried out in vain as he erupted in a fiery explosion.

The horse and rider grew to enormous proportions but they were still separated.

"Don't worry about the horse," Electrum said. She held up a hand. "Awaken the Velociraptor!" she called. From its hiding spot, a smaller, lithely agile Zord zoomed toward them. Electrum teleported into the cockpit.

"StegoZord!"

"CeratoZord!"

The two Zords came out of their hiding places and teleported their pilots to their cockpits.

Red nodded. Skelewar was already making use of his massive size to spew fire on anything and everything he could while the horse stomped and kicked like a wild mustang. "TyrannoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"MastoZord!"

"PteroZord!"

"SmiloZord!"

"StygiZord!"

The Zords began appearing from various hidden places around the city. They were bulky yet eerily realistic. The Zords teleported their chosen pilots into their cockpits. The male Red, male Blue, female Black, male Pink, male Yellow and female Green.

"Activating Megazord configuration," the male Red hit a rather large button in his cockpit. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord came apart and formed a larger helmet, a body shield and a long sword. The Rangers appeared in a large cockpit.

"Activating Megazord configuration," Gold said and used a different button than the one that combined him with the core Megazord. The StegoZord formed an helmeted torso. The CeratoZord broke apart and formed arms while the VelociZord broke apart to form legs. The tails came together to form a spile tipped lance. Gold, Electrum and Silver appeared in a joined cockpit. "Legendary Megazord!"

Skelewar didn't seem too intimidated by the Alpha Megazord. He swung his blade at them but the Stygian Sword was quickly brought up to block the blow. Still, the heat was strong.

"We need to end him quickly before he melts us," Blue declared, wincing as his console sparked at him under the heat.

"Ya think?" Black responded and yelped when her console nearly took her arm off.

"Then let's not waste anymore time," Red agreed.

"Alpha Megazord! Horned Spin Sword Strike!" The Sword formed from the StygiZord began spinning and glowing. The Megazord sped forward rammed the Sword into the monster's orb eye.

The Legendary Megazord ran quickly under the horse as it reared and used the lance to catch it's hooves and knock it back. "Let's see what our new toy can do," Silver suggested.

"Good idea," Gold agreed.

"Well, let's do it then," Electrum ushered.

The Legendary Megazord dropped it's lance and held it as if for a joust. "Legendary Lance!" The lance began to glow and the Megazord zoomed forward, crashing into the horse.

Both horse and rider exploded.

"We did it!"

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow was in a rage. Not only had Lammy stolen and freed Solaria but she'd also joined the Power Rangers! "Will this family never cease to disappoint me?" she snarled. She'd flown at Griff only to have Moriko step in front of him.

"Calm down, can't you see that Griff is as disappointed by Lammy's actions as anyone else?" she said in a calm voice. Griff had been in a surly funk, scowling at anyone who dared look his way.

"If you even think about about betraying me, you'll wish you never climbed out of that portal and back to this palace," she hissed at her little brother and stormed off to her room.

Roki followed her. She sat on the bed and watched him steadily. Her expression was unreadable. "Our marriage is binding. Just because we no longer have the Reaver Orbs or Solaria's power doesn't mean a thing," she told him.

Roki raised a brow and walked over to her. He squatted down in front of her and took her hands. He



kissed them lightly. They were shaking. "Is that what has you worried?" he asked and smiled at her. "Then don't. You are most underhanded, manipulative, scheming, dangerous woman I have ever met. I wouldn't let you go even if you tried to leave," he told her. "You belong to me now," he said and gave her a wicked grin.

She reached out and threaded her hands through his hair and then bunched them into fists. "As long as you understand that you belong to me as well," she said and gave his hair a little tug.

"You and me from now and forever," he said and leaned up, connecting their mouths in a fierce kiss that neither wanted to.

-x-

The Reavers gathered. Each of them wore crystals on chains around their necks. Tai had offered up a section of his land for this little get together. It was clearing near a cave with naturally forming crystals within it and a stream with a waterfall. There was a nip in the November air, but that didn't stop Rex and Win from setting up a grill and people from bringing drinks and coolers. Wood had even managed to set up a music station. This was the last time they would see the Reavers and they'd formed several friendships between the two groups.

Fey now had her yellow Venus Crystal back. She was teasing Wood. "Go dance with Tori. You don't want me to start interfering, do you?" she asked him.

Wood blushed. "No!" he said.

Fey cackled wickedly. "Then go," she said and gave him a little push.

Muttering under his breath about pushy cousins, he went over to Tori, who was chatting with Yelena, wearing her pink Neptune Crystal. She happily agreed to dance with him.

Ros, wearing her gray Pluto Crystal, laughed as she joined the other woman with Autumn, "She needs to take her own advice sometimes," she said to Autumn.

"Oh really?" Autumn asked,

"Don't start with me, Rosalind," Fey said stiffly.

Ros ignored her. "She has a thing for our commander, always has done," she commented. Autumn chuckled at Fey's discomfiture. "Oh, I have something for you," Ros said and went to her purse and pulled out a gift bag and handed it over.

Autumn took the bag and peeked in curiously. She gasped when she saw Creepy Alien. "Oh, Ros. I can't," she denied.

Fey was glad to have the focus off herself. "Sure you can. That hole hullabaloo was for your sake," she said, rolling her eyes.

Autumn laughed and hugged the two women. "I'm going to miss you guys so much," she said tearfully.

Taran was talking with Hayden who now wore a red crystal around his neck. "I still can't believe it," he said, shaking his head.

Taran clapped a hand on his shoulder. "You've more than earned it. You'll make a great Sun Reaver. Solaria wouldn't have chosen you if you hadn't," he assured him. "It was great fighting by your side," he said.

Hayden nodded. "It's been an honor, Taran," he said. The two men were quiet a moment then Taran excused himself to talk to the McCall twins who had their own Crystals back. They were eager to speculate on who from the Command Ship Solaria had chosen to take Hayden's and Tori's places.

Chloe wandered over to Hayden. "So, you're the boss now?" she asked with a smile.

Hayden chuckled. "In a manner of speaking. Oh, thank you for the pictures to take home to my parents," he said, referring to scenes from around the city she'd taken. He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "You have a great talent. Don't let all this good and evil stuff get in the way of that," he said.

Chloe shook her head and smiled. "I won't. I'm too stubborn for that," she said with a grin. "It was nice knowing you Hayden Bly," she said. He grinned and gave her a wink.

She wandered over to Rex, who was manning the grill. She rolled her eyes at him. "Isn't there anything you can't do?" she asked.

"Nope," he answered without hesitation. She whacked him in the arm. "Ow, geeze. How has Danny's arm not fallen off?" he grouched as he rubbed the sore spot. She just smirked, feeling rather pleased with herself. She ignored Danny when he came over to demand to know why Hayden was kissing her.

Lammy was there at Taran's insistence but she was apart from the others, studying some old scrolls under a tree as she listened to the waterfall mingle with the music. She ignored Win when he sat down beside her. He nudged her arm insistently. She sighed. "What?" she demanded and looked at him.

He grinned. "Come eat. You're one of us now," he said. Ever since she freed Solaria, his voice was back to normal. He had a feeling the goddess had a hand in that.

"No, I'm not. It's a means to an end. Don't you forget that," she told him, wagging a finger in his face.

He shook his head and grabbed her finger. "No. You're one of us. We're strangers now, but we'll be your new family. Autumn said you're staying with us until we can get you settled into your new life here. She even agreed that cranky brother of yours can come visit if he agrees not to try and knock my head off again," he said.

Lammy tried to purse her lips but they wanted to smile. "He wasn't trying to kill you," she assured him.

"We'll agree to disagree on that," he said. He stood and offered his hand. She sighed, put her things away and took his hand. He helped her up and she joined the group. Not for the first time, Tori greeted

her with a hug. She was currently Lammy's biggest fan for not only helping Win but for freeing Solaria.

Lammy wasn't used to being part of a big group. It had been her and Griff for so long she wasn't sure how she was going to get used to this but she supposed she'd give it a try.

Tai watched silently for awhile and went over to Lani. "Want to see Fort T-Rex?" he asked her quietly.

She looked at him in amusement. "What on earth is that?" she asked.

Tai chuckled. "It's the best dang fort ever made by a couple of eight year old boys," he said. "There's a posted sign that says no girls allowed but I can bend the rules a bit," he teased her.

Lani laughed. "I can't wait to see this masculine paradise," she said. "Are you sure we should go sneaking off?" she asked.

"Rex can cover for us," he said and began leading her away. Blushing but curious, Lani followed him.

Rex snorted when he saw them sneaking away. He flipped another hamburger patty. Things were good right now. If only they'd stay that way. Well, tomorrow was a long way off and today was pretty much perfect. Why mess with that?

-xEnd Chapter 11x-

## 12 - In a Flash

Danny was in the Blue Lab. It was Alpha 5's lab where he'd kept Beta Z. He and Billie had taken it over and now some people had taken to calling it the Blue Lab recently. This was because there were several areas now in use.

There was the Medi-Lab in which they'd installed Medi-beds and updated them. Billie was working on modifying the technology into something more portable for field dressing in emergencies.

Another lab had been converted into Billy's domain. He'd declared it was much better than sleeping on a tiny space craft. It was also where he liked to tinker and think and get away.

Beta Z had moved out of the Blue Lab. They installed her recharging tube in a smaller room that she was decorating herself without much worry about complements and contrasts. She put in what she liked. There was also a terminal in there that only she could access. When her android body couldn't be found anywhere else, she would be there.

Then, there was the Zord Lab. Well, that's what they called it. Holly had taken it over and it was covered with blue prints and schematics for Zords and vehicles as well as various parts, tools and welding equipment. Danny seriously doubted anyone at school knew just how smart she was. She was gorgeous *and* brilliant. Double whammy.

He was sketching an idea when he heard the door whoosh open. He figured it was Billie but the gait wasn't right. He glanced up at Holly as she mosied in. "Do you have a spanner wrench?" she asked. "I think Dad borrowed mine and never gave it back," she said with a bemused smile.

"The question might be do I have one big enough," Danny said with a grin and sat his sketch aside. He went to his tool area which was organized chaos. To anyone else, it looked like a mess but he knew exactly where everything was. As he dug through a few things. "Do you have a five-thou kj capacitor?" he asked her.

"For this?" she asked, looking at the schematic he'd been detailing. "I can probably get one for you."

"Yeah. I think instead of combining weapons I can convert energy directly from the Grid and channel it through the capacitor and increase the potency of our attack ten-fold," he answered and pulled a series of tools out of a box and laid them out for her inspection. "Take ya pick," he said.

Holly nodded. "That's amazing. First Beta Z and now this. You and Billie make quite a team," she said and picked out a spanner in the right caliber. "Are you together?" she asked.

His mind still on his designs, he'd been reaching for his pencil to make a note when she casually dropped that bomb. "Who? What?" he asked, freezing. "You mean, like, a couple? Me and Billie?"

Holly felt foolish she'd asked because he was now looking at her like she had two heads. "Yeah, I guess

so. I think most people assume you are. You're always together," she said lamely.

Danny laughed. "Nah. It'd be like dating myself with boobs. I think Billie feels the same way. I never thought people would think we were together like that," he said with a frown. "'Sides, unless we're workin' on somethin' Wood or Nath's usually around too," he added. "Why do you ask?" he asked.

Holly sighed. "Because, I was wondering why you haven't asked me out yet," she answered bluntly.

"Oh. That's easy; fear of rejection," Danny answered.

Holly nodded. "Well, now nothing's stopping you. Thanks for the spanner," she said and wandered out of the lab.

Danny stood rooted to one spot for a minute then he was at the door. "'Ey? When and where?" he called out to her retreating figure.

She turned and walked backwards. "We can meet at the Youth Center Saturday at seven and we'll go to a movie. Learn how to use an iron by then," she said and disappeared into her lab.

Grinning like a mad-man, Danny put away his tools and went back to his design with renewed fervor.

-x-

Angel Grove park was quiet and peaceful in the twilight hours. The lighting was great for the new lense Chloe's finally-good-for-something brother had rigged up for her. Thanks to him, and probably Billie, she had a camera that Canon and Nikon would kill to copy. It was her pride and joy. She'd spent her sweet sixteen birthday money on a brand spanking new dslr. It was great. One of the best of it's class but anytime she complained about this or that, minor offenses most photographers could live with, her camera would disappear for a few days then reappear with that problem fixed.

She'd never admit it, ever, but she admired Danny his ingenuity. The latest thing she'd mentioned was the need for a flash or lighting system this time of day. She had a new lense the next day made from who knew what but seemed to work perfectly with her camera model.

Mindless of snagging her artfully torn black leggings, scuffing her cute sling boots, or getting grass-stains on her oversized cashmere sweater, she stretched out on the ground and brought into focus a night blooming flower just beginning to open. The petals were dripping from a recent watering. The moisture was seeping through her clothes. She needed to get the picture quickly but, "Ey, move your gigantor foot outta my frame," she snapped to whoever was standing in her shot without looking up from her view finder.

Fox jumped at the sudden voice. "Where the crap did you come from?" he asked, now spotting her laying on the ground with a camera. He backed up a few paces. "Better?" he asked. He hadn't meant to get in her shot, he'd just stopped for a second to fish a piece of gum out of his pocket.

"Yep, thanks," she said and snapped the shot once it was in focus. She got to her feet and grimaced at the state of her sweater. Luckily she was wearing it over a black tank but still. "Ma's gonna kill me," she

said and dusted some leaves and grass off of her clothes.

Fox popped the gum in his mouth. "Happens when you wallow around on the wet ground," he pointed out around a cheeky grin.

"I wasn't wallowing. I was getting an A+ shot," she said.

Fox looked doubtfully at the sky which was getting darker by the second. "In this light? Doubtful," he said. True, he didn't know that much about photography but he knew you had to have light to get a decent picture.

Chloe smirked at him. She switched the camera to viewing mode and showed him the screen with the picture on it. It was a crisp, clear shot. The lighting was obviously dark but the flower stood out proudly, each water droplet was defined.

Fox almost swallowed his gum. "Yeah, A+ shot," he agreed dumbly.

She powered off the camera and covered the lense. "Glad you decided to agree. You only just got that cast off, I'd hate for you have to get another one so soon," she said with a grin.

Fox gave her a wary glance. "No problem. Won't ever be stupid enough to insult your photography," he said.

"You're smarter than you look," she said.

"I'll have you know, I'm quite intelligent," he retorted and stuck his chest out importantly. "Okay, so I don't have a garage full of half finished...." he struggled to find the right word, "things," he finally settled, "and I might not carry a laptop around like a security blanket but your brother and his friend are abnormal," he said. He didn't mean it as an insult either.

Chloe burst out laughing. "Ey, you nailed it," she agreed. "I handed out report cards last term, remember? The only thing you have above a C in is English and Spanish," she said. She, Fox and Tori had the same last period class and she or Tori was often asked to help with things like that.

"Common sense has little to do with grades," he said vaguely and gave a shrug.

Chloe snorted. "Yeah, whatevs. Anyway, I better book. Gotta find my abnormal brother and drag him home for dinner," she said and walked to where she left her bag and began digging for her camera case.

Fox was about to bid her farewell and head to the Youth Center. It was his day off and he'd spent most of the day helping with the clean-up of the University's language building. The words died in on his tongue as he noticed the gray figures headed toward them. "Chloe. Don't be alarmed, but those gray things are headed this way," he said.

Chloe frowned and looked up at him only to see that those gray things were Putties. She pushed her camera in his hands. "Get out of here," she said and pushed him out of the way as the Putties reached them. She whirled around and kicked one in the chest. She used her momentum to push off and turn a

flip.

Fox wasn't a fighter and Chloe was a champion but it wasn't in him to leave a girl alone in this situation. "What about you?"

"I'm right behind you! Go!" she shouted and turned to see a Putty coming up behind him. She wasn't fast enough. It pushed him back. Her camera went flying through the air. Putties converged on it before she could react. One of them caught it. "Ey! Give it back!" she said and ran at the Putty. He tossed the camera over her head before she get it. She smashed his Z in retaliation.

Fox had landed bottom first and he watched the strange game of keep-away for a moment. He ran to her and grabbed her arm. "Leave it!" he said and pulled her away from the Putties.

Chloe, aware that she couldn't reveal herself just then, allowed herself to be taken just as Power Rangers began to appear. "See, they have it covered," Fox said.

With a mental sigh, she ran off behind him. She'd seen that Danny had been dispatched to deal with them. She hoped he'd get her camera back for her. "Thanks for save," she said as hey stopped to catch their breath.

Fox was all but failing P.E. He was doubled over and huffing, unable to come back with a glib response as he struggled to catch his breath. Chloe tried not not to laugh at him. He did try and save her after all. Not used to being on this side of the action she waited for him to catch his breath then walked with him the Youth Center. By the time he got there, he could speak again.

"Hey, thanks," she said with a smile. "I better go find Danny," she added.

"Wait for him here. Call him or something. I don't want you going out there right now alone," he said.

He reminded her of Win just then. She raised her hands in surrender. Dirty and purse-less, she went to the counter. Autumn was there as Win had been sent to the Putty attack. "Can I borrow your phone to call Danny?" she asked and gave a meaningful glance toward the grim-faced Fox.

"Just a sec," Autumn agreed and started to pull a cell phone out of her apron when Win came down from upstairs and Danny walked in the front doors. "Guess it's okay, now," she said, watching Danny move toward Chloe.

"Ey, we need to get home. The heck happened to you?" he asked, eying her appearance.

"She was wallowing on the ground at the Park. Then those gray things attacked us," Fox said.

"You a'ight?" he asked his sister.

"Sure am. Fox rescued me," she said and tried not let her amusement show.

Danny's eyebrows shot up. He looked at Fox. "We owe ya one," he said.

Fox shrugged. "Anyone would do it," he said. "It's still my day off. And I'm a hero, tell one of the curlies to bring me a burger and fries," he said to Autumn.

Spring poked her head out of the kitchen. "You wish. Hero or not, we aren't your maids," she said and disappeared as quickly as she appeared.

"Save a girl's life and still get no respect," he complained.

Autumn chuckled. "I'll bring you a plate," she said.

Chloe snickered. "Thanks again, Fox. We're gone," she said.

"Yeah, thanks," Danny agreed. Fox gave them a finger wave as he headed toward the back and upstairs to his room.

Chloe and Danny bid farewell to Autumn and a slightly confused Win and walked out. "Where's my bag and camera?" she demanded.

"Tori got your bag and took it to the Command Center but there was no sign of your camera," he answered. Chloe frowned. "Tai wants you explain what happened," he said.

"I figured," she said. As soon as they were far enough out of sight of the Youth Center, they teleported.

-x-

### **Palace on the Moon**

"The Putties found something interesting on their latest Patrol," Roki mused to his wife and held up Chloe's camera. "They spotted the Black Ranger girl alone with a civilian. They managed to take this from her before reinforcements arrived," he explained

"That thing looks like it weighs more than she does," she remarked. "Why on Luna did they take it?" she asked. Sometimes those brainless blobs baffled her.

"Who knows? But I think I can use it. What do you think?" he asked.

She took the camera and studied it. "This lense has an interesting filter. It captures very well. Maybe it could capture even better," she said and began to smile.

"My dear, we do make an excellent pair. Let's get to work," he said. Widow nodded and they went to Finster's lab and began work on their latest masterpiece.

-x-

Lammy sat at the counter of the Juice Bar looking through the papers she'd been given earlier that day. Inside were papers establishing her identity as Edlam Goldsmith. Birth certificate, Social Security card, ID, there were even school transcripts. Billie had actually made her take her a test to establish her likely



performance. She was vaguely insulted the girl would imply the human school system would be a challenge for her. When she commented something to that effect, she'd gotten a sour look.

"You're intending to start at AGU next semester, right? Part of the whole Earthling experience? Shut up and take the test," Billie said.

Instead of being annoyed by her behavior, she actually found it refreshing. Being grouched at by Billie seemed to make her feel like part of the team. "I wonder why I didn't get a driver's license?" she said as she looked at the ID she'd been given.

Taran looked at her. "Can you drive?" he asked. He was helping her acclimate to her new life as best he could.

"How hard can it be?" she asked, wrinkling her nose.

"That's probably why you didn't get a driver's license," Win answered as he wandered over to top off her coffee. Like Taran, she quickly became addicted to the stuff. She gave him a smile and picked up her mug, she only just remembered to sip at it rather than taking a hearty drink. She put all her papers back in the brown envelope they'd been stored in. "So, all this stuff makes me human?" she asked.

"It makes you American," Taran answered.

"Oh," she said. "Well, the next to step is find a place to live," she said.

"Good luck with that," Taran said and rubbed his neck. He'd been searching for a place for himself and get off of Tori and Dawn Feather's couch.

"What's wrong with the guest room?" Win asked.

Lammy shook her head. "It's not that. I just need my own space for now. I've shared living space all my life. I need a change," she said with a shrug.

"How, er, would you pay?" Win asked.

"That's the easy part! I have sorts of things I can sell that are worth a lot of money. Gold and jewels are valuable everywhere in any dimension," she answered.

Win nodded sagely. At least that would be taken care of. "You know you still haven't told us what your end game is," he said.

Lammy gave both of them smiles. "I know," she said and downed the last of her coffee. "I have a few places to see today," she said and waved at them as she left the Youth Center. She skirted past Sora with a smile.

Sora wandered over to them. "Where is she off to?" he asked.

"She appears to be apartment hunting," Win answered.

"Oh? There's a space in my building that recently became vacated. I don't know who it was but Manny and her grandmother live across the hall," he explained. It'd been a pleasant surprise when he found out they lived in the same building. "Though I don't know if she'd like it. Most weekends that entire floor smells like tamales and there's no elevator," he said.

"Take me to your land lord," Taran said. He didn't mind the smell of tamales and he knew Sora's building, while not the newest or shiniest, was in a quiet neighborhood and near campus. It was also probably pretty affordable. He already knew it would be perfect.

"I just got here. I haven't even had my tea yet," Sora tried to object.

Taran shook his head. "Nope. We're going now before she finds it. I plan to be off that couch by the end of the week," he said and ushered Sora back out of the Youth Center who continued to try and object the whole way.

Win watched them go in bemusement.

"What was that all about?" Autumn asked as she came in for her shift.

"Apartments," Win answered and gave a shrug. Autumn looked at him curiously but decided to clean up instead of asking questions. She paused, mildly surprised when a marine walked into the Youth Center. The base was clear across the city and almost out in the middle of nowhere. Military personnel weren't exactly their target demographic.

He looked around at the decorations. "I'd heard that this place was back and better than ever but this is amazing," he said. He looked at the Baker siblings as they watched him. He was in his mid-twenties with dark hair and eyes. "Talking to myself again? Bad habit," he said apologetically.

"No better conversationalist is what Gran used to say," Fox said as he bussed a table near the man. "Of course, Gran was bat guano crazy," he added and shrugged. Autumn sent him an exasperated look.

Rocky DeSantos chuckled. "I'm supposed to be meeting two people here. Runty Asian guy, pretty black girl around my age," he said.

"Who are you calling runty?" Adam asked from behind him.

"At least I got a pretty," Aisha said.

Rocky turned and greeted his long-time friends.

"Another one shows up. What's the opposite of a mass exodus?" Autumn murmured, realizing the tall Latino was another former Ranger.

Win shrugged and went back to work as the older trio got reacquainted. They'd eventually find out which one he was. He paused when his communicator went off. "I got this," he said and ducked into the back.

-X-

Chloe was hunting for her camera around the area the Putties attacked her. No one else seemed to care that her most prized possession had been stolen. Danny was off tinkering with things and couldn't be bothered to help her look. She sighed. Okay, so he was working on a powerful new weapon that would help them. She supposed he had an excuse. And she wasn't really there alone. Tori, Wood, Nathan and Rex were helping her look. She had a right to be cranky though, and resentful. Right?

"There's no sign of it anywhere. They must have taken it," Rex said as the little group checked in with each other.

"Why would Putties take a camera?" Nathan asked.

"We don't even know what they were doing last night," Rex said, shaking his head. He knew Tai was worried about it. They all were in a way.

Chloe opened her mouth to say something but Tori cut her off. "Sweetie, you know they weren't here just to steal your camera," she said. Chloe made a face but knew she was right.

"Recon, maybe? Who knows what they're going to do now that they don't have the Reavers' powers anymore," Wood said.

Their communicators went off. Rex twisted his wrists. "Yeah, Rex, here, go," he said.

"There is a monster not far from you location. Be careful. He seems to be able to turn people into photographs," Beez warned them.

"We got it, Beez," Rex said. "Chloe, I think I know where your camera is," he said.

Chloe felt airless. "What did they do to my camera?" she groaned. Then she straightened up. "Let's go get my camera back," she said and twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-X-

Photobomb was a shiny black, one-eyed monster. He didn't have an actual eye; instead a telescopic camera lens was his eye. flash bulbs on antennae protruded from his head and every time they flashed, a person he had in his frame would disappear only to be spit out of his mouth as a photograph. If he managed to get more than one person in his sights, each of them was spit out a separate photo.

"That doesn't even make sense! My camera was a dslr not an instant!" female Black declared.

Photobomb whirled toward him as the Black Team, Pink Team, male Red, female Blue, male Yellow, male Green and Electrum appeared. "Oooh, I'd love to add a few Rangers to my collage," he said and used his hands to frame them up experimentally.

"Don't get caught in his flash!" Electrum said and they all dove for cover. In bright winks of light, male Black, Yellow and male Pink disappeared. They weren't quite quick enough to get out of the frame.

Photobomb spit the photographs out. Electrum ran forward to pick them up. Photobomb shot a bright energy blast in front of her, making her fly back.

"Hahaha, even the almighty Power Rangers cannot escape me," he crowed.

Electrum stood up, she showed them the three photographs. "They're safe for now," she said.

"Then let's do something about this," Blue said and summoned her weapons. "Let's see if you can capture me if you can't see me," she said and shimmered until she disappeared.

The lights on his stalks turned colors, and flared to life in a reddish hue, then began cycling colors until Blue was no longer invisible.

"Billie, watch out!" Red said and ran, drawing his blade on the fly. He jumped and slashed. One of the stalks went flying through the air. Without both lights, Blue vanished again. Sai flew through the air and he only just managed to not get in the lense. Black rushed forward, tucked and rolled, using the Power Axe to cut his legs out from under him.

Pink, rather miffed that her partner had been turned into a photograph, jumped and twisted, hitting the monster with both Fans. Electrum summoned her VelociRapier and slashed him.

Sparking, hurt and one eyed the monster stumbled back. "This isn't over, Rangers!" he said and disappeared.

Red muttered something under his breath. "Let's get these people somewhere safe. I'd hate to think of them being thrown in the trash or something," he said, indicating to the photographs littering the ground.

Black nodded. "Me, too," she said glumly.

"Hey, it's not your fault," Pink assured her.

Black shrugged but helped with the pick-up.

-x-

Billy rubbed his eyes and looked at the Rangers. "They appear to be perfectly preserved. If you can destroy his lense then the effect should be reversed.

"That's great news," Tai said in relief. His best friend was a photograph. It was a state he wanted to remedy as quickly as possible.

"He didn't seem that tough," Win said quietly.

"I think that was only because Billie distracted him when she went invisible. It took time for him to filter through the right lighting to pick her up. I doubt he'd make that mistake twice," Tai said shaking his head.

"Unless he doesn't have a choice," Billie said and went to a console. "If I can insert a command into th

Morph code..." she trailed off, completely forgetting she was talking, her concentration now on what she was doing. She had a frown of determination on her face.

"That's brilliant," Billy declared.

"Any idea what that is all about?" Lani asked Danny.

Danny shrugged. "She's probably going to rig our Morphs to temporarily fluctuate through different light spectrums making it harder for him to capture us with his lense," he answered. "This won't last too long, though. It'll drain a huge amount of energy. I'd better get back to work," he said, his mind already on finishing his project.

"Yeah, you do that," Tai agreed. "That's all we can do for now," he told the others. They began teleporting out of the Command Center.

"Come on, you two. Super sundaes on me," Autumn invited the depressed looking Chloe and Tori.

"Ice cream doesn't heal all the world's hurts," Chloe said. She wavered. "But it sounds good about now," she agreed.

"Yeah," Tori agreed. Autumn smiled and she and the other two teleported.

Eventually only Tai, Lani and the Blues were left. Tai stared the photos of the three Rangers. Billy left him to his thoughts. Lani did not. "You're not helping anything by standing around brooding," she said. "And people call Nathan emo," she muttered.

Tai glanced at her. He rubbed the bridge of his nose. "I know, I can't help it," he said with a sigh. "And I am not emo," he added with a smile flirting at the corner of his mouth.

"Could you please go flirt somewhere else?" Billie grumbled at them. "And I need caffeine," she added. She was a little more snippy than usual. Nathan usually kept her in supply of caffeine.

"Don't worry, Billie, we won't let your tank get low," Lani assured her. "In fact, we'll go on a caffeine run right now," she added.

"We will?" Tai asked.

"Yes, so come one. We can grab some food while we're out. She needs to eat and so do we," she said. She took his hand and looked up at him, giving her best smile. Tai nodded dumbly. Triumphant, Lani teleported them both out leaving Billie to her work.

-x-

Chloe felt depressed. She was laying on a blanket in the park waiting for the monster to show up while staring at the sky. It was cold on the ground. It suited her mood. Someone walked over to her and stood there. "Go away," she said and waved her hand in a shoo-ing motion.

Lammy shook her head and instead plopped down beside her. She looked up at the sky. It was a dreary, overcast sort of day. There wasn't much to see. "What are you looking at?" she asked.

"The moon supposedly but it isn't up yet," Chloe answered.

"It's not so great. It's gray and there's no sky, just dark and stars and the Earth. Gets old after awhile. I much prefer it here," Lammy said.

Chloe snorted. "Didn't want to move there. Just waitin' for my camera to come back so we can kick its tail," she said. "Thanks for saving Rex, Wood and Nath," she said.

"I'm wearing the suit, may as well own it," Lammy said with a bemused expression.

"What are you after anyway?" Chloe asked, knowing she hadn't answered that question yet and doubted she would now.

Lammy surprised her by laughing. "A library. Not an ordinary library, but just a library. But it's heavily warded against evil and it'll need to be opened by someone with powerful Good magic. That's where Taran comes in. From what I've learned, there used to be a custodian, the Librarian, who guarded the knowledge within, a powerful magician in her own right. She sealed it and hid the entrance and either a powerful Good wizard or the next Librarian are the only ones who can open it," she explained.

"Huh. So you're actually a nerd," Chloe said. "That's unexpected. Why not just tell everyone?" she asked and sat up to look at her.

Lammy shrugged. "It's too much fun watching them squirm," she answered, making Chloe laugh for the first time since she lost her camera.

People screaming in the distance caught Lammy's attention. "Looks like you're getting your wish," she said and got to her feet.

Chloe hopped up, too. Their communicators began chiming. She twisted her wrists and answered. "We're on it," she said and looked at Lammy, who had a serious expression on her face. "Let's do this," she said. "It's Morphin' Time! Mastodon!"

"Velociraptor!"

-x-

Photobomb was back and badder than ever. His flashes were fixed and he was confident that he was unstoppable. He arrived in Angel Grove in a flash of glory. "Say cheese!" he called out to a group of unsuspecting middle school girls. They screeched and tried to run away but they were caught in his frame. He spit them out gleefully.

He stumbled back when black and purple laser blasts hit him in roughly his chest. "Ugh, what?" he demanded looking around. Electrum and female Black Ranger were first to arrive.

"I really hope Billie managed to finish what she was doing," Black said. Electrum agreed. They jumped out of the way as Photobomb fired laser blasts at them through his flashes.

"Pretty, pretty Power Rangers. Hold still! You're both so photogenic," he cajoled them. Black and Electrum ducked behind cars to avoid his flashes as he tried to capture them.

"What about us? Are we pretty enough for you?" The rest of the Rangers arrived, flanking him.

"Oh, yes! Just hold still," he said and his lense adjusted with a whirring sound trying to focus on all of them.

"Billie, now!" Red shouted.

Female Blue nodded. She tapped her helmet and made her computer appear. There was a program already loaded. She just pressed the enter button to execute it.

Photobomb stumbled back in confusion when the Rangers began to flicker. They're suits and helmets shifting colors at a random rate. He couldn't focus on any of them. "What have you done?" he demanded. Instead of trying to capture them, he began trying to blast them.

He was still formidable and had everyone scrambling away. "We don't have much longer with the filter," female Blue warned them.

"Can we form the Mega Cannon without Rex, Wood and Nath?" female Red called out.

"No time, we'll distract him. Billie, get him right in the eye," male Red said and drew his Tyranno Sword. All around him other began summoning their weapons. They ran forward, some had to dodge, others got in close enough for glancing blows and some weren't fast enough to avoid being hit.

Female Blue took a deep breath. "Power Sai!" she summoned her weapons. She turned invisible. Even her flickering powersuit could be seen but being completely invisible would help her more now. She moved forward quickly. As Gold and Silver each got off a couple of blows, she had the opportunity. She tossed her first Sai.

"Eh?" Photobomb's lense adjusted to see what was coming toward him. He didn't have a chance, his lense shattered and he staggered back. Enraged and unable to see he released a volley of laser flashes that had the Rangers scrambling for cover even as their filtering program ended.

"That was either really brilliant or really dumb. I haven't figured out which one yet," female Black commented.

"Both," Silver declared.

Three points of blaster fire hit Photobomb as the male Black, Pink and Yellow Rangers arrived.

"Miss us?" male Black asked.

Snarling, Photobomb turned toward his voice.

"Get down!" female Black shouted just as the monster unleashed a volley of blasts that had the three scrambling for cover now.

"I was wondering why everyone was hiding," male Pink said.

"Wonder no more," male Yellow said.

"Cannon time but we have to be fast. Are we ready?" male Red asked. He got an affirmative consensus. "Mega Power Cannon!" Twelve Rangers came in close. They combined their weapons, all of them, to form a rather large, multi-barreled cannon. The male Red Ranger aimed the Cannon. "Fire!" the male Red pulled the trigger.

"Alpha Legend Cannon!" Silver, Gold and Electrum fit their weapons together to make a cannon with a long nose and a trigger. "Fire!" The nose began to glow, pulsing gold and white, gaining intensity before finally blasting to join the six points of energy fired from the Mega Power Cannon.

Both blasts hit the monster. He was knocked off his feet. He lay there for a moment, smoking and sizzling but he eventually got back to his feet, dusting himself off. "That stung. Stupid Rangers!" he said and began firing at the general vicinity of where the blasts came from. The Rangers scrambled for cover again.

"What the--" male Red couldn't even formulate the words.

"We are so screwed," male Pink said.

"Na. We got this," male Blue said. "Tai, summon the Magnum Power Cannon," he shouted. He hadn't quite finished it and asked Holly to put the finishing touches on it. He just hoped she'd finished.

Red nodded. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He stood. Silver and Gold ran forward to cover him, using their oversized weapons to deflect energy blasts from the monster.

"Magnum Power Cannon!" male Red summoned. A large red and blue thing appeared. It stood on a tripod and was at least six foot long. It was vaguely wing shaped and swooped outward with one huge barrel in the middle and six small barrels on each side of it. A triggering mechanism jutted toward him, allowing him to aim and fire. When he touched it, his Power Coin began to glow. They all did. Each barrel began to glow, starting from the outer most and going inwards until the large barrel began to glow as well. "Magnum Blast!" he pulled the trigger. The individual points of energy converged as they blasted through the monster, all but vaporizing him as he exploded.

"Wow," was all Red could say. "Danny, if we were paying you, you'd get a raise," he said.

The monster regrouped and grew into an enormous proportion. He gave a laugh. "This is even better!" He said and began taking pictures of the city and each time a building was converted to a giant photograph.



"Ah, man," male Blue complained. "I ain't got no fancy tricks for that," he said.

"That's okay, Danny. I do," Holly's voice said into his helmet. All their helmets. "Magnum Alpha Megazord," she prompted.

"Let's try it then," male Red said. "TyrannoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"MastoZord"

"PteroZord!"

"SmiloZord!"

"StygiZord!"

"StegoZord!"

"VelociZord!"

"CeratoZord!"

From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location teleporting their pilots aboard. Male Red was inside the TyrannoZord. He found a new button on his console. "Activating Magnum Alpha Megazord Configuration!" he said and pressed the button. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. The pilots teleported into an enormous combined cockpit.

"Ohh, ohh, can I get a pic of that?" Photobomb asked and turned toward him. His flashes began charging.

"Nope. This time, you say cheese," male red said and turned toward the monster. "Magnum Dino Blast!" he lined a target on the screen and depressed buttons on the arms of his yoke.

The dinosaur heads opened their mouths and fired just as his flashes went off. It was too late. He exploded with the power of all nine zords hit him in in the lense. The lense shattered a split second before the rest of him exploded.

On the ground, the female Black ran forward when a small dark object fell to the ground. She picked up what was left of her camera. It was totaled. "I am totally sending a bill to the moon for this," she declared. She managed to open it and take her memory card out. "Maybe I can at least get that A+," she muttered with a sigh.

-X-

Back at the Command Center, Tori was scolding Wood after the debriefing. "I was so worried. I wish I could you not to do anything like that again, but I guess it comes with the job," she said, loosing momentum before it could even build. She sighed and threw her arms around him in a tight hug. "I'm so glad you're okay," she said.

Wood grinned. "Takes more than an over grown camera to put me down," he said and hugged her back.

Tori nodded then she stood on her tip-toes and kissed him quickly. "Incentive," she told him and slipped away, leaving him staring after her with a gobsmailed expression.

Nathan laughed. "Close your mouth, your letting flies in," he said with a laugh.

Wood blushed and clenched his jaw shut.

"What I wanna know is where my incentive is to stay outta trouble," Rex said.

"How about this; stay out of trouble or I'll kick your can," Chloe told him.

Rex chuckled. "That'll work," he said and she gave him a smirk.

"That goes for you, too," Billie said, pointing at Nathan.

He gave her a salute and grinned.

Tai shook his head. "Okay, okay. I think we're done for the day," he said. There was nothing else to say. They'd scraped through a victory today thanks to Danny, Billie and Holly.

"Oh, yeah. What time is it?" Danny asked and looked down at himself.

"You don't have time to get mom to iron you anything, but come on, let's go see how we can shine you up to be good enough to go out with Holly," Chloe said to her brother. The two siblings teleported.

"Well, come on then, girl. Let's go get you ready for the big date," Manny said to Holly. She and Lani latched on to their protesting friend and they teleported.

Autumn snickered. "Hey, wanna tour the new Casa de Goldsmith?" Taran asked her.

"Oh, you got the place?" she asked. It would be nice to spend some time alone with him without her family interrupting anything.

"Yep. I hope you like tamales. Manny's Abby gave me a bunch," he said. She laughed and the two of them teleported.

Lammy pouted. So unfair. Her apartment hunt so far was a miserable failure so far.

"Come on, I'll treat you to a extra large coffee of your choice," Win invited.

She smiled at him. "Sounds like a plan," she agreed.

And soon the Command Center was empty, all but Beez and Billy, who had work of their own.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow was agitated. Roki watched her pace around the throne room. "That should have been a victory. What happened?" she demanded.

"They found a way to counter the lense filter," Roki said, rubbing his forehead.

Widow whirled around to snap at him that she knew that, but stopped short. "*They* didn't. *She* did. The Blue girl," she murmured. "Zita!" she shouted. Roki raised an eyebrow wondering what devious plans were forming in her wonderfully conniving mind.

Zita appeared presently. "You bellowed?" she asked.

Moriko and Griff peaked into the throne room, trying to be unobtrusive.

"That Blue girl. The first thing you did when you arrived her was target her. Why?" she asked.

"She's brilliant. I thought if anyone could hack into the Nordroz Corp. mainframe, she could. She did but covered her tracks so that no one else could follow her," she said, making a face as she remembered that.

Widow nodded. "Imagine that mind working for our side," she said.

Roki shook his head. "The last time we tried that, we nearly rotted his brain," he reminded her.

Zita bit her lip. "There is an option we haven't considered," she said. Both of them looked at her. "It's extremely dangerous. It requires re-forging the Sword of Darkness," she said.

Moriko's mouth dropped open. She knew was going to be a little erratic until she came to grips with being alone but now she was just talking crazy. "Zita's right. The Sword of Darkness is an extremely dangerous thing," she said, deciding to try and talk sense into these people.

Widow ignored her. "What do you think?" she asked Roki.

Roki considered it. "We can give it a try," he said. Zita nodded.

Widow grinned. "Then we have some work to do," she said.

-x-

Beez was in the Medi-Lab as results from blood-tests they'd recently done on the Rangers came back. They'd taken the samples to establish how the genetic abilities had changed them. "Billy, could you come here, please?" she said into the comm system.

Within moments Billy was by her side. "What is it?" he asked.

"It was as you suspected. The substance in Winter's bloody stream you couldn't identify was not related to his treatments with Widow's experiments. It is present in every human Ranger. And see here," she showed him a graph of their DNA, "They each have a slight mutation," she explained, highlighting a portion.

Billy nodded. "The mutation is genetic. That means it is likely to be passed along to the next generation," he posited.

Beez nodded. "However, there were two anomalies," she said. A holographic image of a double helix appeared, yet it was slightly different. There was a variance that Billy recognized instantly. He gaped, his eyes going wide. "Somewhere in his lineage, Rex has an Eltarin ancestor," she explained.

"He doesn't have the mutation," Billy said.

Beez shook her head. She deactivated that hologram and a new one took its place. If Billy was surprised by the variance in Rex's DNA, he was astounded by the new image. It was a triple helix. "Beez?" he asked.

"It is Sora's DNA," she explained.

"This explains so much. Why he has such a powerful weapon, and why he can only manifest two additional clones. How far back does this go?" he asked.

"One generation. His father was Triforian," Beez answered.

"Fascinating," Billy mused. He frowned suddenly. "I don't think he knows," he said. "Is it our place to tell him?" he wondered out loud.

"He should know," a new voice intruded. Jason was standing at the door. He'd been there for awhile. Billy obviously had no idea, but the smile Beez sent him told him she'd known. "I can tell him," he said. "Rex needs to know too, but now isn't the right time," he said.

"What do you know that we don't?" Billy asked him.

"Things that are way above my pay grade," Jason answered. Billy didn't know how to answer that. Jason just smiled. "I'll go pay Sora a visit," he said and sauntered off.

Billy looked at Beez for answers but she was unreadable, her face serene as she cataloged the blood test results. "Shall we begin analyzing the unknown substance?" she asked him.

Realizing no answers would be forthcoming, Billy nodded. "Yes, let's," he agreed. She smiled and nodded.

-xEnd Chapter 12x-

## 13 - Dark Rising

The Moon had not been quiet. The Rangers scrambled often to fight some new monstrosity the Moon had thrown at them. While tough, they weren't exactly getting any better. It was beginning to feel like busy work. Meanwhile, they still had to juggle school, competitions, work and family. Family seemed to be the trickiest part.

Sora having to contacted his mother at Terra Venture on the planet Mirinoi about his father. Lammy met Taran's adoptive parents in Kansas over Thanksgiving. Chloe and Danny had to disappear suddenly during a trip to New York to spend time with their father. It was all sticky.

Rex was highly annoyed. Though they usually tried to rotate who was sent out into the field unless it was absolutely necessary, Rex had still been required to leave his sister unsupervised at some teeny-bopper concert the day before when a monster attacked nearby. His parents had been giving him a hard time about it. Especially since it wasn't the first time something like that happened. He knew he didn't have a good excuse besides the truth, which he couldn't tell them. Being caught in the stampede of people running for safety while coming back from the bathroom didn't seem to be an adequate excuse. To make matters worse, Rena had tried to take up for him.

Finally, with a disappointed shake of her head, his mom had finally let it drop. Dad had stayed out of that one for the most part but he didn't really stick up for his poor son either. Rex was finally allowed to leave, feeling a bit like crap. His parents were usually the cool parents people always wanted. He guessed even the cool parents had to put their feet down sometimes. He was headed toward his car when he noticed activity at the house across the street, which belonged to the crazy old cat lady Mrs. O'Bannon.

There were a couple of girls knocking on the door with suitcases stacked up behind them. The blond pounded on the door. "Granny!" she shouted and pushed the doorbell a few times.

"I thought you said your parents talked to her," said the one with the short dark hair.

Ordinarily, Rex wouldn't have been too nosey aside from casually checking them out, but something stood about them. It was the way they wee dressed. They seemed to each being uniforms of some sort but different from each other's.

"They did! I wouldn't have asked Justin to leave us here if I didn't think she was expecting us," the blond girl said and knocked on the door again.

The brunette girl shrieked when a cat appeared and pounced playfully on her boots, beckoned by a loose lace. "What was that?" she demanded.

"It was a cat. Granny has several of them."

"There's nothing like that on KO-35," she grouched.

Now that definitely caught his attention and he walked over to them. "Mrs. O'Bannon isn't there," he said helpfully.

They turned then to look at him. Both of them were young, probably sixteen or so. The girl with the edgy black bob had fair skin and silver eyes. He definitely recognized that uniform now that she mentioned KO-35. The blond had slightly curly hair with brown streaks and braids running through it. She sported a Terra Venture staff uniform. She also had a pair of the prettiest blue eyes he'd ever seen. She stared at him for a long moment then blinked and looked away, flushing slightly. She then frowned. "What do you mean she isn't here? She has to be. She's expecting us," she complained.

Rex shook his head. He brought out his keys, found the one he'd been given last week and unlocked the door. "She went on a cruise and asked my mom to feed her cats for her. She'll be gone for at least two more weeks," he said and pushed the door open.

The blond closed her eyes as if to summon up patience. "Well, thank you--" she gasped and both girls covered their noses.

"What is that smell?" the other girl demanded.

"That would be the litter boxes. My sister is supposed to clean them. She, understandably, shirked that duty it seems," he said.

"There's no way I'm staying here. I'll sleep on the ship with Justin and Carlos," the brunette said gagging.

"Zhane would love that."

"Then I'll find Sora and stay with him. Cassie knows where he is."

"Shh," the blond belatedly tried to shush her friend and they both glanced guiltily at Rex.

He grinned at them. He closed the door and locked it up again. "We'll go over to my house and sort this problem out. Sora you say?" he asked. "I think I know a Sora," he said casually.

They gave him suspicious looks. "Oh, really? What do you know about Sora?" the brunette asked.

"I know his parents were on Terra Venture," he said and pointed at the blonde, "and that he later went to live with his cousin, Cassie, on KO-35 and learned their style of martial arts from a man named Zhane Rahl," he said and pointed at the brunette.

The girls shared a look. "The only way you could know any of that is if you're a Power Ranger," the brunette said suspiciously.

Rex snorted. "If I'm that easy to figure out, you'd think my parents would and get off my back a little. Come on. We'll head over and I can call in re-enforcements to see what we can do about that house. I'm Rex, by the way. Rex Hart," he introduced himself.

"I'm Zara. Zara Rahl and this is Melody Robinson," the brunette piped up.

Melody gave him a brief smile and a finger wave. "We're, um, here to train with the Power Rangers. Sort of. It's a long story and I'd rather only tell it once," she added.

"Fair enough," Rex said and helped them take their things across the street to his house. He briefly explained to his parents that they were meant to stay with Mrs. O'Bannon but there was a communications snag. His mom went into mother-mode and began to fuss over them immediately.

Rex ducked out and teleported to the Command Center.

-x-

Billie left the Youth Center with an extra-large, extra-sweet, extra-creamy coffee and her laptop bag. She wanted to work on some of her projects this weekend. She was almost finished with what she called a hand-held healing device and she had an idea for an armor piece for the Reds and the Greens, as well as a weapons upgrade. Winter needed a better weapon sometimes and if he could get one with some powerful armor, all the better for him. After all, from what the records say, the Green and Red Ranger had a shield they could share. It was woefully outdated but she could go from there.

Her mind was so occupied she didn't even realize when she made it home. There was no car in her drive. That meant that the Doctors Davis were at work. On a Saturday. She sighed and entered the empty house. Her parents were brilliant. Mr. Dr. Davis was a brain surgeon. Mrs. Dr. Davis was a rocket scientist. They were on the cutting edge of their fields. She was proud of them but it'd be nice if they were home every now and then. She'd ended up having Thanksgiving with Nathan's family because they'd been called into work at the same time.

"There you are, sweetie."

Billie jumped when she heard her mother's voice. On the short side and slightly plump, her mother didn't look like she designed missiles for a living. She looked more like she baked cookies all day. Which was hilarious because the woman couldn't boil water. "I didn't think you were here. Your car's gone," she said.

Mrs. Dr. Davis gave an absent smile. "It's in the shop. I was going to the store for some milk and it died on me," she explained.

"Dad's been after you get a new one," Billie said with a smile. "I'm going to go to my room. Nathan might come over later to study for mid-terms," she said and started to head up the stairs.

She never saw it coming. She felt a sharp pain in her neck and everything went black. Imposra caught Billie and the coffee cup before it could spill everywhere. The faceless woman-shaped monster with a conical head lay her down briefly and neatly disposed of the coffee in the sink and threw the cup away. She shifted into Billie, jotted a note and stuck it on the fridge.

'Needed to go to the computer store. If Nathan drops by, tell him we'll reschedule. -Billie'

Swiftly reforming to her true shape, Imposra cradled Billie in her arms and disappeared.



-X-

Tai arrived at the Command Center at Beez's behest to see a gaggle of elders all standing around trying to talk over each other. There were two new faces in the clutch. A young man in a Galactic Policeman's uniform and a Asian woman in a Kovarian science uniform. She held a silver case in her hand.

He shook his head. And they were supposed to be the grown-ups. He stuck two fingers in his mouth and gave a sharp whistle that garnered all their attention. They turned and looked at him.

Cassie Chan, Pink Astro Ranger, smiled at him. "You must be Tai," she said. "I think there was a break down in communication somewhere," she said. She patted her case. "This and two other packages are supposed to be delivered here. I was told we were expected," she said. "I suppose that's what I get for letting Zhane make the plans," she said.

"No, no, it's my fault," Jason said as he strode into the Power Chamber. Where he'd been previously, Tai didn't know. "I'm sorry. I was told to expect you but you got here before I could pass it along," he said. He didn't face her as he spoke to her, instead looking at Tai. "Things began to happen quickly," he said.

Tai nodded. "So what's up?" he asked.

"Beta Z asked Zhane to do something for her," he explained.

Holo-Beez appeared. "Indeed I did. Apologies for my absence, Tai. I am at a dig site in central Africa," she explained.

"Why are you at a dig site in central Africa?" he asked. "No, wait. That's for later," he said. "The Zhane thing and the packages?" he prompted.

"He's looking for the lost Coins," she answered. "There is also some civil unrest on KO-35 and for safe-keeping, he sent us the Astro Morphers and his sister," she explained.

"Andros and Cassie are staying to try and keep the peace, but they wanted the Morphers where certain factions of the government couldn't get to them in case things got out of hand," Cassie explained. "So we hitched a ride with him since he was on his way to Earth," she said and jerked her thumb at the young Galactic Policeman.

"Which brings us to the third package," Justin ?? said. "My original assignment was the space around Mirinoi but I've been sent back to Earth to rendezvous with Carlos while we await orders for the change-up. Again, another story for another time," he said. "Karone will be traveling with Zhane but aside from that, she wanted me to smooth out the transfer of her pupil; the future Pink Quasar Ranger," he explained.

"While not technically Rangers yet, they will be and I've agreed to watch over them and further their training," Jason explained.

Tai cocked his head at the big man. He decided not the question he had front of so many others, but he

would definitely be talking to him later. "Okay, so Astro Morphers and Rangers-in-training. Did I miss anything?" he asked.

"Nope, that's pretty much it," Cassie said.

Billy took the case from her. "I will see this safely put away," he said. Jason nodded at him. There were only three of them and Beez that knew where the Archive was, which where outdated or broken Morph Tech was kept. It was where the Power Coins had originally be stored.

Rex appeared. "Aha, Justin and Cassie," he said. "I believe you lost something," he said.

"We did?" Justin asked.

"Yes. Mrs. O'Bannon is bat guano crazy and didn't remember her granddaughter and a friend were coming to stay with her and her fifty cats. She went on a cruise last week," he answered.

Cassie made a face. "Yikes. Where--?"

"My house. For now," Rex answered.

"Well, instead of crashing with Sora, I'll stay with them until she gets back," Cassie said musingly.

"Isn't Mrs. O'Bannon the one whose house smells like--?"

"Yep," Rex answered Tai's question with a nod.

"Like what?" Cassie asked unsurely.

"Cat pee," they answered simultaneously.

"But don't worry. We can clean up the house and kennel the cats until she gets back," Rex said. "I assume you'll be filling us in on what's been going on?" he asked Tai.

Tai nodded. "I think I got most of the story now," he said. He looked at Jason, who conveniently wasn't looking at him.

"Oh, and let's not tell Sora I'm here yet, okay guys?" Cassie said with a grin. "Now, take me to the girls and let's see what we can do about the house. You're Rex right?" she asked and latched on to his arm.

"That's me," Rex answered and teleported out with her.

Tai smiled. Justin was looking around at all the changes with rapt attention. Eventually he disappeared into the consoles, just like he used to as a kid. "Okay, Beez, about central Africa?" he prompted, letting Jason slide this time.

## Palace on the Moon

Widow drew Billie's blood. She couldn't get to the hidden Power Coin, no matter what she'd tried. Her blood was the next best thing. She took a rather sizeable vial and went in the depths of the Palace to where Zita and Roki awaited her. Moriko vowed to have nothing to do with this. Widow understood her concern. The Sword of Darkness was not something to be taken lightly,

In a dark room upon a blade mold were the pieces of the Sword of Darkness Rita Repulsa had once used to turn Tommy Oliver evil. It would serve such a function again. "We must all agree one last time. Do we want to do this?" she asked.

"Yes," Zita said immediately.

Roki nodded. "Together we should be able to keep the Sword's power in check," he declared.

Widow nodded. She took a breath and poured the blood over the blade. They joined hands around the mold. They began to chant and the blade began to glow. Brighter and brighter it glowed until they could no longer look at it. It gave off so much heat they had to stumble back, breaking their link.

When the glow was gone, so was the Sword.

-x-

Moriko paced outside Widow's lab where Billie was unconscious on an examination table. "This is madness. Utter madness," she said and chewed on her thumbnail.

"What's the big deal?" Griff asked, watching her pace.

Moriko shook her head. "I feel it in my bones. This is not going to end up how they want it to," she said quietly. She bit her lip. She turned suddenly and saw Billie standing in the entrance of the lab.

Griff subtly slid himself in front of Moriko. Billie gave an amused sort of smirk. "I'm not going to bother her. Chill. After all, how much damage can I do?" she asked and gave a grin. "I'm a caffeine addicted klutz," she pointed out.

Moriko narrowed her eyes. There was something off about her. "It's already done, isn't it?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

Billie tilted her head. No, not Billie. When she ruled the world, she'd be known as Mina. Yes, that had a more regal and elegant air than Billie. "Is what already done? Why have I been brought here?" she demanded.

Moriko shook her head. "Ta. You can't fool me," she said.

Mina gave a shrug. "Worth a try," she said and her eyes gleamed darkly for a moment.

Widow, Roki and Zita arrived after hurrying once they realized the Sword must have found its new host.

Mina gave them a minute bow. "I really must commend you for your forethought of turning me evil," she said. She saw things in a completely new light. She was so much smarter than nearly everyone around her. Only Danny and Holly could possibly hope to compare. She didn't count Dr. Billy, who despite his youthful appearance was well past his prime. While she always knew that, she only just now appreciated it.

She recognized though, the strengths of others. As she glanced at the Repulsas, she realized she probably smarter than they were combined. They wouldn't be too much of a problem. Without such things as moral quandaries, her world opened up in a whole new way. Her mind was already working overtime. She had to play it cool for awhile though. eventually her friends would see things her way.

"I'm pleased to the see the process worked," Widow commented. For a moment Mina had completely forgotten she was on the Moon.

"So, what now? Infiltrate and destroy from within, I assume. You understand that this will take some time. I don't want to draw attention to myself," she explained. "So I'll keep devising ways to destroy your monsters for appearance sake while I figure out the best way to destroy the Rangers," she explained. She'd have to get Autumn first, she realized, otherwise she might squeal about her aura changing or something.

"Very well, but you will report to us regularly. You don't want to cross us, do you?" Zita asked, snarling slightly.

Mina widened her eyes. "No, no. I will of course report to you regularly," she promised.

"Then we should have no problems," Roki said stiffly. Scruffy and seemingly benign, there was something about this girl that almost made him regret using the Sword on her.

"Come along. I'll show you where you can train and get away when pretending becomes to much" Widow said wrapped her arm in hers.

Mina allowed herself to be led around.

-x-

At the Youth Center, Sora was moping. Getting touch with someone on Terra Venture wasn't the easiest thing in the world, even for a Power Ranger and even then his mum hadn't been very informative about his father. She claimed to have met him as a girl, they enjoyed a whirlwind romance and were married and divorced within a year. The problem, she supposed, was because he was an alien and hadn't told her. Sora tried to remember the last time he saw his real father. When he gave him the miniature sword he wore around his neck, he realized.

He was so deep in thought, ruminating instead of studying like he was meant to be doing at the Youth Center, he had no idea anyone was sneaking up behind him. "Sora-kun! Why you no visit me!"

Sora jumped and turned, seeing the grinning face of his cousin and not his old crone of a grandmother. "I hate it when you do that," he said. Few people knew that Cassie was also of Japanese descent on her

mother's side and they shared a very tyrannical grandmother who'd hated coming to America with her new husband when they were newly married.

Cassie laughed and reached up to pinch his cheeks. "But your reaction is always so priceless," she teased him.

"You laugh but your mum pushed her off on my mum to take across space. You had the luxury of visiting only when you were forced. I had to live with her," he griped.

"Then you came to live with and we lived happily ever after, blah blah blah," Cassie said.

"What you doin' here anyway?" he asked.

Cassie sighed and sat across from him. "That is a long story and has your idol in the middle of it," she said.

Sora sat back down with a chuckle. "What has sensei done now?" he asked.

"Treat me to one of those teas and I'll tell you all about it," she said cajolingly.

"Sure, and by the way; your map drawing skills are rubbish," he declared. She made a face at him and ignored that. He smiled and went to counter to order two teas. He returned to have a long chat with his favorite cousin.

-x-

Melody and Zara had spent a very uncomfortable night in a smelly house with too many cats. Melody had finally managed to get in touch with her grandmother who claimed she never even spoke to her parents but since she was there she could make herself at home. Melody half hated being there and was half psyched.

Her parents were scientists on Terra Venture. Her dad was a botanist and her mother was a forensic anthropologist. They wanted Mel to be just like them, but she had no interest in science. As a child she preferred spending time in the jungles to interning on Terra Venture. Her parents were never approving of that. They liked it even less when they found out a few years later that Karone had taken an interest in her and had been teaching her Hei Quan; a modified version of martial skills she'd been taught while raised as Astronema.

Mel loved Karone, always had. About five years ago, while exploring the jungle around Terra Venture, she got lost and was hurt. She found the Quasar stones. No one knew where they'd been hidden except the Power Rangers. In awe, she'd touched the Pink Quasar Saber's handle. That day changed her life.

She didn't draw the Saber from the stone, but it marked her. She rubbed her right hand as she thought about it. It wasn't always visible, but her hand had a mystical brand. Karone and Kendrix had found her not long after that. It was then that Karone finally relented to teach her. One day, she was going to be called on to draw the Saber from the Stone.

Her parents didn't know all that. When the science department of Terra Venture gave them assign on a different continent, instead of letting her go with them or stay with Karone or even Kendrix, they supposedly arranged for her to come back to Earth to stay with a grandmother she didn't even remember. Karone assured her that it was the best move sense she and Zhane had something to take care of themselves and she'd be away from Mirinoi. She arranged the transport with Justin, who stopped by KO-35 to pick up Cassie and Zara.

Melody had met Zara on many occasions when Zhane would visit Karone. They got along well. Friends for the stay they liked to joke.

Cassie had left them in the capable hands of Rex Hart that morning while she went to hunt down Sora. Rex brought over some breakfast his mother had made for them. Pancakes and sausages. They were delicious.

Zara had been skeptical, food on KO-35 wasn't as varied as food from Earth. She was an instant fan. After breakfast and lot of other teenagers showed up the house and began to help them clean and catch cats to take to a kennel. There had been fifteen of them.

"No wonder the house reeked," Nathan said, shaking his head at the stack of pet carriers containing cats.

"Can't one of you brainiacs event some kind super odor neutralizer?" Lani asked, holding her nose as she sprayed a bottle of odor neutralizing spray on a chair in the living room.

Mina almost snapped that she had better things to do, but forced herself to reply in a differently snappy tone, "I'll get right on that," she said drily. She didn't even know what she was doing there. Nathan and Wood showed up at her house with beaming smiles and wouldn't take no for an answer. So she went along.

She had to get away from here. Feigning the need to pee she contacted Widow and asked for a convenient attack on Angel Grove. She had to get to the Youth Center before Autumn got an eyeful of her.

When she walked back downstairs it was to find the room in half way decent shape. They were a great team. If she had it her way, she'd keep it that way.

Mel was putting another cat in a cage when she heard several chimes go off.

"That's just what we need," Chloe complained.

Tai twisted his wrists and activated his communicator. "Go for Tai," he said.

"There are Putties attacking in down town Angel Grove," Beez informed them.

"We're on it," he said.

"Can we do anything to help?" Zara asked.

Tai shook his head. "Only active Rangers invited to the party," he said.

Mel sighed. "We understand," she assured them. Zara crossed her arms over her chest and nodded.

"Let's go," Tai shouted and the Rangers morphed.

"Let's go see if we can find Cassie," Zara said.

"Sure thing," Mel agreed.

-x-

Mina appeared in the back of the Youth Center and went invisible. She snuck past Fox cursing at the stove and slipped upstairs. She knew that Rei would be wherever Sora was. Only the twins were an obstacle if they were around, which she doubted since Autumn and Win were probably both at the battle sight.

She'd never been up to the living area of the Youth Center. It was as sprawling as the Center itself. She checked rooms briefly. She had to hurry or she'd be missed. For sure. Finally she entered the girliest camouflage green room she'd ever seen. She smirked. Sitting on the made up bed was the stuffed Gold Ranger rabbit Ros had given Autumn. "Perfect," she said. The Sword of Darkness appeared in her hand; she touched the tip to the rabbit. Thick black smog seeped into the rabbit.

While she was creeping around, she decided to find Win's room. It was easy to find. She walked in and glanced around. She didn't see anything that stood out overly much. She wandered over to a few Native American artifacts and a little carved wolf on a shelf. She studied the wolf. It was obviously made with great care. It wasn't as old as the artifacts. It must hold some sort of significance to him. It would do.

She stepped back and touched the tip of the Sword to the wolf. It absorbed the black smog.

Satisfied, she made the Sword disappear and teleported to the battle fully morphed. She intervened just as a Putty tried to take Danny's head off.

"Thanks for the save," he said.

"No problem," she said. She saw male Red fighting himself. Imposra was the monster that impersonated her mother. She didn't like that. She tapped on her helmet and made her computer appear. The computer analyzed the monster for a weakness. She had a score to settle. There was always a minor flaw, she realized. Like her mother had a freckle on her right ear but Imposra's had been on the left ear. The imposter Red Ranger's dino symbol was reversed.

"The chest!" she shouted.

Male Red jumped back and lunged forward, stabbing the monster right through the chest. Imposra shouted and reverted to her true form. Now that she was revealed, she began launching energy attacks at them. They were powerful enough to have the Rangers running for cover.

"I think it time to bring out the cannon," the male Black said pointedly. He took out a Putty trying to get the best of Chloe.

"I got it, thanks," male Red responded. "Magnum Power Cannon!" he summoned the weapon and stood behind it. When he touched it, their Power Coins began to glow. Each barrel began to glow, starting from the outer most and going inwards until the large barrel began to glow as well. "Magnum Blast!" he pulled the trigger. The individual points of energy converged as they blasted through the monster, all but vaporizing her as she exploded.

She grew to enormous proportions. "Ahhh! You foolish Rangers. You have no idea what's coming. Even if I'm not your doom, you are doomed," she shouted at them.

"Let's shut her up," male Green suggested.

"Good idea. I'm tired of always hearing about our doom," female Black said drily.

"I'll handle it this time," female Red said. "TyrannoZord!"

"TriceraZord!"

"MastoZord"

"PteroZord!"

"SmiloZord!"

"StygiZord!"

"StegoZord!"

"VelociZord!"

"CeratoZord!"

From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location teleporting their pilots aboard. Female Red found the button on her console. "Activating Magnum Alpha Megazord Configuration!" she said and pressed the button. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. The pilots teleported into an enormous combined cockpit.

Impostra laughed and her shape shimmered, making herself into a copy of the Megazord.

"This can't be good," Red said.



They ducked when Impostra tried to swing at them.

"I have a feeling she'll be just as tough as we are," Silver commented.

"Then we need to strike hard and fast," female Blue said. She'd made sure she was in the Megazord this time. Impostra was getting dangerously close to spilling her beans in desperation.

"Yeah, I got it," Red said. "Magnum Dino Blast!" she lined a target on the screen and depressed buttons on the arms of her yoke.

The dinosaur heads opened their mouths. The dinosaur heads on the phony Megazord opened their mouths as well. The blasts met, rocking them, making the cockpit nearly explode.

Anger seethed through Blue.

"Well, that didn't go as planned," male Pink said.

"Ya think?" Black grouched at him.

Blue was busy at her console. She accessed the programming through her helmet computer while the others struggled to get the upper hand on the monster. She grinned triumphantly and rewrote a bit of code. "Try it again," she said. "The monster is capable of what we could do. I doubt she knows what we can do," she said and sat back.

"Here goes nothing," Red said. "Magnum Dino Blast!" She lined the target up on her screen. This time when she pressed the buttons, not only did the dino mouths come open but their tail whipped up and four points of energy were fired at the monster. Impostra had tried the same trick again, but Blue's modifications made all the difference.

This time when the energies met, hers were overpowered and they hit her full force. She assumed her true form before exploding.

Pink reached over and pulled Blue close for a hug. "You did it, Glitch," he said.

Blue just nodded as something else became clear to her. She didn't even hear the others praise. It didn't matter near as much as that brief hug.

-X-

## **Dark Dimension**

Widow and the Repulsas had shown Mina how to access the Dark Dimension, thinking she could train there. They had no idea the boundless possibilities that existed there. She'd already conquered it and made it her own. It was a headquarters of sort. She blocked all access to other parts of the Black Keep, as she liked to call it, except for herself and those she allowed in.

It was late and she should be asleep. Even the the Youth Center was closed and all had gone to bed. Except for Winter and Autumn. They joined Mina in this late night meeting.

"What are your plans?" Autumn asked, sitting cross legged on a floor covered with pillows.

"We have to keep up appearances for now, so try to act like you usually would. We'll even fight against the monsters. I will eventually bring everyone to our side," Mina answered.

Autumn frowned. "What about Taran? I don't think you can turn him evil," she said.

Mina paced slightly. "We'll have to deal with him when the time comes. I'll try my best. The Sword is a powerful thing," she said. "Don't you have anything to say?" she asked Win.

He shook his head. "No. I'm just glad I'm fully functional," he said and grinned slightly.

Mina rolled her eyes. "They are shockingly bungling, aren't they? Oh, well, they won't be a threat for long. I'll let them believe they have me in check for now. It suits me just as well," she said.

"What's next?" Win asked.

"I'm going to collect my generals and work on my King," she answered.

Autumns brows shot up. "Your King?" she asked.

"Every Queen needs one," Mina answered with a shrug. "We'll meet again soon. You can go now," she said dismissively. Autumn and Win stood. They gave her deep bows and teleported out. Mina left that room and went to where she set up a temporary lab. She had lots to do, both as Billie and Mina. Leading a double life was going to get tiresome very quickly.

-xEnd Chapter 13x-

## 14 - Nemesis

Fox wasn't sure how he got roped into this. He'd just been innocently delivering some food to Randi, Adam and Trini at the Dojo when he was spotted by the Kennedy's. Chloe was the main instigator. She'd challenged his ego.

"If you gonna go around saving damsels from Putties, then you should know what you're doin'," she challenged him.

"Ah, leave him alone, Chlo. Ain't his fault if he can't hack it," Danny had said.

Fox knew they were just trying to get his goat, but unfortunately, they succeeded. They had an audience. Those two new chicks from wherever they came were in the same room and listening to the conversation. Adam and Trini were eating and watching as well.

Zara and Melody had found themselves largely welcomed by the group of Rangers. Everyone was being helpful by helping them fit in. Though Jason had said he'd agreed to oversee their training, he'd been called out of town quite abruptly, so Adam had been put in charge of them for the time being.

Kovarian martial arts was very similar to karate but Hei Quan was more like Kung Fu and he'd asked Trini to stop by and evaluate Melody's style to see if she could help continue her training. Trini was an expert in Mantis Style Kung Fu but her early training consisted of more mainstream techniques.

Being the top students in the Dojo, Danny and Chloe decided to help where they could, but Fox's arrival distracted them.

He took off his shoes and stepped onto the blue mat. "So where do I start?" he asked sourly.

Chloe and Danny snickered. "He sounds so enthusiastic," Danny said drolly.

"C'mon, let's get it over with," Fox prompted.

"A'ight, a'ight," Danny said and attempted to teach him a basic defensive move. "Got it? When Chloe comes at ya, don't hesitate just because she's tiny and a chick. She'll kick your tail in a heart beat," he warned. He stepped back.

Fox braced himself but it was no good, when Chloe came at him, he landed on the mat. After this happened a few more times, he was willing to call it quits and never try to rescue a girl again.

"My eyes. I can't watch that any more," Zara declared and clapped her hands over her eyes.

Fox turned red, making his freckles pop. "That's it. I'm through being tortured by you sadistic siblings," he told the Kennedy's.

They shared a confused look.

Melody laughed. "They aren't being sadistic. No one's perfect the first time, but maybe it's the karate throwing you off," she suggested.

"What's that got to do with it?" he asked.

"I don't know how to explain it. Even though karate was brought over from China, there's still a fundamental difference between karate and Kung Fu. Here, let me show you," she prompted. "Slow down, be more deliberate. Don't rush it," she said and taught him a different defensive move. "See, next time she comes at you, you have better leverage for taking her down," she said.

Fox just nodded. Melody got out of the way. Chloe came at Fox again. This time he almost succeeded in winning. It was only her superior experience that saved her. Still, he grinned for the first time since entering the Dojo of Doom.

Trini clapped her hands. She got to her feet. "Fox, would you like to learn more?" she asked as she approached the group.

Fox shifted uneasily. "I don't know. I never been into the whole doing physical activities thing," he answered.

"You should give it a try. I think you have a feel for it," Zara said. She'd watched again when Mel had interfered. She was just speaking the truth now.

Trini nodded in agreement.

"I could give it a try. Even the curlies do karate. I'm kinda tired of being the misfit," Fox agreed. He looked at his watch and grimaced. "Win and Autumn have been snappy lately. If I'm late getting back, it'll be my head," he said and retrieved his shoes and hopped out while trying to get them on.

"It's time to actually get to work," Adam told the four that were left.

-x-

Fox was a few minutes late getting back to his next shift at the Youth Center. Autumn gave him this tight, almost scary sort of look that startled him. "If you're late one more time, we'll have to start docking your pay," she said in a quiet hiss.

He held up his hands. "Sorry," he said. "I'm getting right to work," he assured her and grabbed an apron and went to the dining area to begin bussing tables.

Autumn appeared at the counter momentarily. "I am so sick of this," she told her brother. He hushed her quickly when Lammy and Taran walked in.

Taran gave Autumn a broad smile. She managed to return it, but it was difficult. She knew, even if Mina wouldn't admit it, that he would never join them. "Espresso?" she asked.

"Sure. Everything okay?" he asked.

"Fine," she said trying to sound up beat.

Lammy sat down beside him. "Gimme a caramel Frappuccino," she ordered from Winter. "Guess what?" she said, nearly bouncing.

Win made her order. "Couldn't begin to," he said.

She made a face at him. "Your no fun lately," she said. "Well, I finally found a place! You should see it once I've moved in. It's amazing. It has a view of the bay and the city," she continued.

Win gave her a grin. "Really? That does sound amazing," he said. He was confident that Lammy would easily join them. She never claimed to be Good to start with. "Can't wait to see it," he stated, reaching out and taking her hand.

Lammy grinned.

Autumn gave Taran an apologetic smile. "Excuse me for a bit. I'm not feeling too well. Win, cover for me," she said and disappeared into the back. She went up to her room and teleported.

Taran frowned after her. "Is she going to be okay?" he asked Winter.

Winter shrugged. "It's cold season. I'll check on her in a bit," he said.

Taran nodded. "Maybe I'll drop by later and check on her myself," he said and stood.

"Wait," Lammy said and stood as well. "Sorry, Winter, we just dropped by for the coffee. He's helping me sound proof the new place," she said.

"I understand," Win said. They'd had to soundproof his room just so he could have some relief from the relentless noises. He wasn't as great at adapting his hearing like they seemed to be. They gave him farewells as they left the Youth Center.

Winter scowled, annoyed by his sister's behavior. He'd address it later.

-x-

## **Dark Dimension**

Mina was easily able to get to Tai; her first general. It was simply a matter of turning invisible and cracking the combination of his locker. It was the only time his sword was unattended.

Now he was hers.

He was familiarizing himself with the Dark Keep when Autumn arrived to throw a tantrum which

consisted of throwing furniture around and pillows being tossed in the fire place.

"Problem?" he asked casually.

Autumn jumped and spun around. "What are you doing here?" she asked.

"What do you think I'm doing here?" He straightened up from the window he was gazing out of.

Autumn smoothed a hand through her hair. "I hadn't realized Mina recruited you already," she said.

"Our Queen is not answerable to you. Why are you throwing things around?" he asked.

Autumn narrowed her eyes. "I am understandably a little upset that Taran won't be joining our cause," she answered.

Tai frowned. "Mina cares about you. Do you think she would really allow you to suffer that way? You shouldn't doubt she'll do everything in her power to bring him to you," he stated

Autumn felt chagrined. Her face flushed. "Of course. You're right. I shouldn't doubt that," she said.

He put a hand on her shoulder. "The transition period is going to be difficult for everyone," he said. "Don't lose faith in the Queen. She won't let us down. Any of us," he said. He pulled a pair of shades out of his jacket pocket and slipped them on. He teleported out of the Dark Dimension.

Autumn sighed and went around fixing everything she'd broken. Tai was right, Mina would find a way for her to have Taran.

-x-

Justin and Carlos were at the Command Center with Beez when Tai arrived. Lani and Rex were there as well. "Made it back from Africa, I see," he said to Beez. "Have a good trip?"

"Yes. Thank you Tai," she answered.

"What's this?" he asked gesturing to Carlos and Justin.

Both of them were Galactic Police officers; Senturion Squad. Justin was the Blue Senturion and Carlos was the Green Senturion. Justin always kept in touch with his old friend, the Blue Senturion and eventually both he and Carlos entered the Galactic Police Academy. The Blue Senturion was now their captain and Justin had taken over his role. They'd been separated as Carlos was assigned to KO-35 and Justin Mirinoi but they'd been partnered up to patrol Earth vicinity space. They were supposedly awaiting three others to join them but new orders had come through.

Coincidentally, Beez had summoned them to answer a few questions concerning a message she'd received. "There are things happening. Things I am unsure of," she answered. "I was hoping Justin and Carlos could explain more," she answered his question.

"We're clueless," Carlos answered.

"We just got word that the remaining members of our team will not be assigned to us because the new owners of the Galactic Police Department are phasing out the Senturion program. We are being allowed to remain here on duty while the change over takes effect." Justin explained.

"Who can buy a Galactic Police Department?" Lani asked.

"Space Patrol Delta," Beez answered. "From my research it began as a small police force on Sirius but started expanding shortly thereafter. They have requested access to our history of Earth's Power Rangers and hope we'd be willing to share any information on Morphing technology we can," she explained.

Tai shook his head. This was not even about good or evil, there was no way some unknown entity was getting into their records. "No," he stated.

Rex nodded his head. "We'll have to learn more about this Space Patrol Delta," he said. "Who sent the request?" he asked.

"A Sirian called Doggy Cruger," Beez answered. "I am looking into this more, never fear," she assured them.

Tai nodded.

"Sorry we couldn't be more help," Justin said.

"It's ok, guys," Lani assured them.

"We should get to our patrol," Carlos reminded Justin. The younger man nodded. They teleported out of the Power Chamber.

"So what's with the Sun Glasses at Night?" Rex asked his best friend with an amused expression.

Tai stared at him for a long moment and felt the burning need to knock that smirk off his face. "I think I'm getting a migraine from your thousand watt teeth," he answered.

Lani snorted, trying not to laugh.

Rex just smiled wider. "Ok, I gotta go. Me and the Rat are in serious training mode. I don't know what's worse; mid-terms coming up or the inter-city gymnastics meet," he said. He gave them a wave and teleported.

Lani shook her head. "You shouldn't give him such a hard time. He works his butt off to be Mr. Perfect," she scolded Tai.

Tai just gave a ghost of smile and nodded his head. He knew Rex's strengths and weaknesses better than anyone. Before this was over, they'd have to settle once and for all which of them was superior. He

found he was looking forward to the battle. It would be an honorable match. One that has been long in the making.

"Well, I don't mean to leave it at that, but I promised the girls a night for ourselves," she said and crooked her finger at him.

He obediently leaned closer to her. Instead of the peck on the cheek she intended, his captured her mouth in a breathtaking kiss. Blushing madly, she broke away and teleported.

"Tai, come here. I need to take a measurement," Mina sad from the passage way that led to the labs. Tai walked toward her. She ushered him to her lab where she set out measuring him. There was never a mention of their plans in the Command Center. Beez was everywhere and, until Mina could reprogram her, not to be trusted.

-X-

### **Palace on the Moon**

Moriko visited Zita's room. Zita gave an annoyed eye roll when she saw her sister. "What is it?" she asked as she brushed her hair. Magically she would make it look anyway she wanted but sometimes brushing it calmed her.

Moriko shook her head. She moved in and took the brush from her sister taking over the task. "I'm worried. Not many things worry me, but I have been worried ever since you concocted this harebrained scheme," she answered quietly.

"Then you worry too much. Mina, as she likes to call herself, is the epitome of obedience," Zita answered.

"I think she's playing the long game. She says she's close to being able to bring down the Power Rangers but why hasn't she? I do believe the Sword of Darkness has truly corrupted her, don't get me wrong," she said with a sigh and continued to play with her sister's hair.

Zita flattened her lips. "Then it is time we reminded her who's in control around here," she said simply.

Moriko just sighed and nodded. "Very well," she agreed.

In Finster's lab, Widow and Roki eyed his latest design. "What is it?" Widow asked the ratty servant.

"Oh, mistress, he's great. His name is Blarney. He has the gift of gab and can cause localized earthquakes," Finster answered.

Roki rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Send it to the kiln," he instructed Finster.

He and Widow left the lab. Zita met them in the throne room. "It may be time to have a word with Mina. Make sure she's doing her job," she said.



"She checks in regularly but so far she has been a stellar disappointment," Widow said and wound her fingers together. "Perhaps you're right. It shouldn't take someone that brilliant this long to come up with a plan to destroy the Rangers from the inside. A demonstration of our power if she doesn't help us this time," she said. She glanced at Roki and he nodded.

"Very well," Zita said and turned on her heel. She was just letting Moriko get to her, that's all.

-x-

Mina took a break from all her plans for a bit of personal business. Nathan was prone to letting his grades slip even worse than usual when he was training for a competition. It was usually up to Billie and Danny to get him through these periods. The inter-city meet was coinciding with mid-terms which was not good news. As Billie she'd fuss and squawk but as Mina she wasn't worried. By the time mid-terms rolled around, it wouldn't be an issue. Now, however, it was a convenient excuse.

She arrived at Nathan's house and his older sister Braithe informed her that he was training in the basement and for her to go on down. She signed a quick thank-you and went down. The basement was Nathan's living area. Half of it was his bedroom, the other half was divided between music and training. He was a lot more serious about training than most people suspected.

His legs were hooked over a bar suspended from his ceiling when she came downstairs. A weight was clutched to his chest as he did gravity defying sit-ups. She watched for a few minutes. She dropped her book bag on his bed. After a minute or so he dropped the weight with a loud clang. He blinked when he noticed her. He grabbed the bar and pulled himself into a sitting position and dropped off. "Study time all ready?" he asked and picked up a towel to wipe the sweat off his face.

"It can wait 'til after you take a shower," she said.

He pouted. "Aw, Glitch, are you saying you don't like me all sweaty?" he asked, draping his towel around his neck.

She gave a roll of her eyes refusing to answer one way or the other. "Go clean yourself up," she said, and gestured to the stairs.

He grinned and opened his arms. "Let me give you a hug first, to thank you for all the study help," he said.

"Absolutely not," she said and backed up a step. She might enjoy the sight of him all sweaty, but that didn't mean she wanted to be covered in it. He lunged and she tried to duck away. "No!" she cried out. He managed to catch her and lifted her feet off the ground.

He grinned triumphantly. "Caught you," he said.

"So you did," she said. She leaned in and kissed him. He was so surprised her almost dropped her. Luckily she was awkwardly tall and it wasn't much of a drop. "I'm not apologizing," she said stubbornly.

Nathan's face softened. Sure he was surprised, but he also ecstatically happy. "You don't have to

apologize," he said. He cupped her face in his hands and leaned down to kiss her again.

-x-

Winter time in Angel Grove was perfect for ice skating, which was what Tori and Wood were doing. There was a quiet little ice rink that Wood knew about. He'd taken Tori there for a date. They did that now. Went on dates that is. He was the luckiest guy alive. Or at least, he usually was. Only this time, there was a complication. Almost everyone he knew decided to show up. Tori thought it was funny but he was rather put out.

Danny had dropped by with Holly, swearing up and down that he hadn't realized Tori and Wood would be there. Then Chloe dropped in with Melody and Zara. They were trying to teach the Kovarian girl how to ice skate. She was awful at it.

Tori squeezed his hand to shake him out of his thoughts. "Quite pouting. So what if our friends showed up. It's still fun," she said and nudged him with her shoulder.

He gave a sheepish smile. "I know, but this is the first time in ages we've had the chance to be alone and everyone showed up. If I didn't know Billie was rubbish in skates and would never show her face here; not to mention she's tutoring Nath; I'd almost expect them to show up," he said.

Tori giggled. "Yikes, I cannot imagine Billie trying to ice skate," she said.

Wood made a face. "She tried it once. We all agreed it was an incident never to be repeated," he said. "It was so much worse than that," he said and they watched Zara's feet fly out from under her as she hit the ice butt-first.

Tori winced sympathetically. "I'm glad I didn't have to see that," she said. She pulled him toward the retaining wall. They leaned against it for a moment. He glanced around a moment then leaned down and kissed her. The earth shook. They both pulled back, surprised. "Sweetie, I like your kisses but I don't think that was us," Tori said.

Wood shook his head. The ground shook again. Cracks began forming in the ice. Their communicators went off. "Definitely not us," he said and twisted his wrist as Danny and Chloe came in close to them. "Wood here," he said.

"A monster and a patrol of Putties have appeared near your location," Beez informed them.

"We're on our way," Wood assured her.

Danny nodded. "Hey, Hols, why don't you take them to the Command Center," he said gesturing to Mel and Zara. Holly nodded.

Zara made a face. "We can help," she said.

"You aren't Power Rangers," Chloe said apologetically.

"We know," Melody said with a grimace.

"Let's go," Tori said and the little group left the rink. As soon as they were sure they wouldn't be noticed, they teleported.

-x-

Blarney was a rocky monster etched with lava cracks and bright red lip prints. His face was literally hewn from stone, the cracks and crevice making up his face. He also had a long large sword made of rock. He crashed it into the ground, sending tremors around, cracking concrete and shaking buildings.

"Bah, California," he spat. "Always expectin' earthquakes and reinforcin' the buildings. Well, we'll just have to try a wee bit harder, won't we laddies?" he said conversationally to the Putties who where swarming around harassing people or being thrown off balance because of the tremors. He raised his sword and prepared to strike the ground again, this time with direction and more strength. He swung but the sword bounced off a force-field that was formed under it.

"No more of that, please," the male Red Ranger said, propping his sword against his shoulder.

Blarney could now see that he was surrounded by Power Rangers. Red was accompanied by the male Blue, female Black, female Pink, male Yellow, male Green, Electrum and Silver. "Ah, I was hopin' you lads would show up," he said gesturing to Red and Silver. "I've been told the two o' you have the Emerald Isle in your bones. What's it like there? Roki and Widow said they'd let me have it once I defeated you," he said pleasantly enough.

"Never been there, and technically not Irish. At all," Silver answered, shaking his head. "But, unfortunately, you'll never be seein' the place either," he said and summoned the CeratoSword.

"You guys handle the Putties. We'll take on this," Red said.

"Right!" the others agreed.

"Ah, lads, I thought we'd be a bit more civilized, but I see I was hopin' in vain. Never mind. Prepare yourselves, boyos," Blarney said and rushed forward with his sword, swinging with skill and elegance for his ungainly form. He was a surprisingly good match against both Red and Silver.

-x-

Ostensibly Mina was suppose to be home cleaning up, but after a quick shower she appeared in the Dark Keep. She was monitoring the situation. She was pleased that Sora had been dispatched to the fight. It would make her job much easier. After quickly checking on Taran's whereabouts -- the Command Center -- she teleported to Sora's apartment.

Glancing around, she had to admit, he had good taste. She spotted her quarry. It was a miniature replica of his CeratoSword on his faux mantle, a larger version of the one he wore around his neck. She wasn't sure of the significance of the swords, but she knew they probably had the same meaning to him as Tai's katana. She drew the Sword of Darkness and touched the miniature sword. Inky black smog enveloped the sword.

Satisfied with today's work, she teleported to the Command Center.

-X-

Green was up to his neck in Putties. He really hoped Mina would get rid of these annoying creatures. He was easily fighting through them, but their numbers were becoming quite ridiculous. He phased out just as several of them jumped at him. They passed through him and piled on top of each other. He waded out of the confusion.

Electrum jumped and skewered the pile of them with the VelociRapier. They disintegrated. "Looked like you needed a little help," she said.

"Thanks," he said.

She gave shrug. "Someone has to watch your back when Autumn's not around," she said.

"I have something that can help with that," Mina's voice said over there comms. Green shimmered for a moment. "Tap your wrists together and summon the Stygian Armor," she instructed.

Green knocked his wrists together over his chest. "Stygian Armor!" He dropped his arms to his side. Briefly a bright green digital matrix glowed over his upper body before a chest shield formed reminiscent of the Stygian Dagger, all black with gold embellishments. A weapon formed in his right hand. It looked like a trench knife with a black triangular blade that was as long as a sword perfectly made for him.

"Nice," he said, grinning under his helmet. Electrum whistled under her breath. With renewed vigor he went on the offensive against the Putties. Electrum still had his back.

Black was watching her brother's back as they tag-teamed a group of Putties. "Your friend, she does good work, but why can't the rest of us get nifty stuff like that?" she complained and axed a Putty in the Z.

"Take that up wit' her. The shields are her pet project," Blue answered and gutted a Putty with his Lance.

"Shields plural?" she demanded. She scoffed, shaking her head and took it out on a few unsuspecting Putties.

"Brat." She didn't bother to deny the accusation.

Pink and Yellow were making a pretty good team. They had each other's backs. Yellow leapt hither and yon while Pink's helmet front popped open continually to shriek at the Putties. Though, she tried to depend more on her fans than ability. "Going to need some honey lemon tea after all that," she said and gave a little cough.

"We might need Nath here to lay down some cover," Yellow said, leaping in close to several Putties and slashing them methodically with his daggers.

"I think we got it handled," Pink said.

The amount of Putties had diminished but Red and Silver were still having a hard time with Blarney. There was a brief moment there it became iffy for Silver. He suddenly staggered, giving the rock monster an opening. Only Red tackling him and rolling him out of the way saved his hide. "You all right?" he asked.

Silver nodded. "Never better," he said in a tone of voice reminiscent of the Skeleton Ranger.

Red grinned under his helmet. "Let's show this thing who's boss," he said. Silver nodded. Together the two of them went on the offensive.

Blarney was surprised and uneasy. They were fighting like demons. They traded blocks and blows. He staggered back, smoking from a dual attack. He clutched his chest, badly damaged. "This isn't over, Rangers," he warned them. His lava cracks glowed and seemed to explode, breaking apart and disappearing.

The other Rangers dispatched any remaining Putties.

"Let's go. He'll back," Red instructed. The Rangers teleported.

-x-

## **Dark Dimension**

Sora looked around the keep, familiarizing himself, looking over his dark team mates. "So this is where the magic happens?"

"Something like that," Mina answered absently. She bit the inside of her cheek in agitation.

"Is something wrong, Mina?" Autumn asked, noticing her agitation.

"Hmm? No," Mina answered, shaking her head. "Things are going well enough. I'm just annoyed with my so-called allies. If they keep testing me I'm going to have to reveal my hand before I'm ready," she answered. "Not that it's a problem, but the longer they remain ignorant, the better for all concerned," she said.

Tai nodded thoughtfully. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," he said.

"Is there anything we can do to speed the process along?" Win asked.

Mina shook her head. "Just don't give yourselves away yet. We know better than anyone what would happen if we were discovered," she said.

"They'd rally together, be on guard and we'd have to face them head-on. No one wants that," Tai said with a sigh. He paused. "Well, maybe a little," he amended. The chance to face down Rex was very tempting. However, he did not want to be on opposing sides against Lani.

Mina shook her head. "Not unless it comes to it. I doubt it'll get that far. I have contingency plans. Oh, and Autumn, reaming out Fox is a bit suspicious. Dial it back a little," she admonished.

"I warned you," Winter told his sister.

She flushed and glared at him. "I apologize, my Queen. He's just so annoying sometimes," she said.

"Yes, he is, but you must put up with it for now. Just a little longer," she said.

Autumn nodded. "What about the monster?" she asked.

Mina shrugged. "We'll handle it together with our friends," she said and smiled. "Now, it's time to train. Tai," she said and began walking away. Tai followed her. His expertise in sword play and martial arts was one of the main reasons she recruited him.

Sora rubbed his hands together. "Guess that means we're free to go," he said.

"I think I'm going to hang out here. It's quiet," Autumn said.

"Then we'll leave you to your peace and quiet," Win said. Sora grinned and gave her a brief wave. They teleported out of the Dark Dimension.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Blarney returned beaten and battered. Zita almost took him out herself.

"Please be, mistress. It wasn't my fault. It was those Rangers. The Red one and the Silver one. They weren't right," he said, getting to his knees and holding up his hands in a pleading gesture.

"No excuses. You were a waste of perfectly good clay!" Zita snarled and made an energy ball appear in her hand.

"Wait!" Moriko said and grabbed her sister's wrist. "What do you mean 'not right'?"

Blarney paused. "For all me wondrous ways with words, I canna say for sure, mistress. They just weren't right," he said, seemingly shocked at himself for not being able to elocute accurately or eloquently elaborate.

Zita gave an exasperated sigh but Moriko's mouth went dry. "Power him up. As much as possible as fast as possible," she said and hurried off to find Griff. Dread was crawling down her spine.

Zita scowled at her sister's retreating figure. Then she scowled at the monster. "Let's go," she said.

"Many thanks'ee for the reprieve, mistress. You shan't regret it. I shall champion your cause with the me

dyin' breath. I shall be the sword that rains devastation down upon your enemies. I shall--"

"Enough!" Zita said and clenched her fist, effectively cutting off his speech as she led him to Finster's workshop. She'd work on healing and powering him up then sending him after the Rangers once more. Yet Moriko's continued unease was beginning to effect her.

Shaking it off, she began working on Blarney.

-X-

Rex was hoping to take a break from gymnastics training to have knock-down drag-out spar but his favored partner was unavailable. So he headed to the Scott Dojo looking for some sport. He didn't feel bad about slacking off training. The Rat had declared she wasn't going to do a single stretch until she had some mall time with her friends.

He came upon Jason limping along with ice taped around his knee. "Whoa, I thought you were retired," he quipped.

"Tell that to the paleontologist who still insists he may have to suit up again one day and demands to be kept in shape," Jason said with a grin. "Didn't expect to be seeing your face until the big meet," he said.

Rex shrugged. "Taking a break. Decided to cross-train a bit. You got anyone who's butt needs kicking?" he asked.

Jason chuckled. "One karate trophy and he thinks he's master of the universe," he drawled. "Danny and Chloe are in Room 3 with Melody, Zara and Fox," he said.

"Fox?" Rex asked. "Oliver? Scrawny kid, freckles? Smells like french fries?"

"That's the one. Trini is trying to teach him Kung Fu," Jason answered.

"This I have got to see," Rex said and darted off to the men's changing room. Jason shook his head. He had to remember to tell Tommy that they sparred earlier today.

When Rex poked his head into Room 3 he was amazed by what he saw. He made a mental note to hang out at the dojo more often. The instructors weren't there but Danny seemed to be supervising things. In nearly a blur, Zara and Chloe jumped, flipped and tumbled across the blue mats as they continuously clashed together dual sticks, about two foot long apiece. A wooden dummy was set up in front of Fox. He was hitting the offset arms in a rhythmic manner. Occasionally, the pretty blond Melody would stop him, move him aside, demonstrate and let him go again.

He walked up behind Danny. "We gotta get these girls on the team," Danny said without looking at him.

"Zhane must be one monster of a sensei," Rex said.

Danny gave a grin. "You only saying that cuz you ain't seen Mel in action. I think Karone might have Zhane beat," he said. "What brings you by?" he asked.

"A little break. Tai's off doing Tai things so I figured I'd come and show Jason's students a thing or two and he sent me here," Rex answered. "How's that going?" he asked, nodding toward Fox.

"Could be better. He needs someone to kick him in gear. Trini and Mel are too nice and keep letting him slack off. If I knew the first thing about Kung Fu I'd be all up in his business," he said. He noticed Rex's grin. "Aw, crap. What do you know about Kung Fu?" he demanded.

"I've dabbled, nothing substantial," Rex said. "Go stop your sister and Zara from killing each other," he said and walked toward the training dummy.

Danny muttered a curse and went to where Zara and Chloe's spar has escalated as each girl was determined to win and using any mean necessary including genetic abilities and telekinesis despite Fox being right there in the room. Hoping that Rex was distracting Fox, he created a force-field between the two and began to ream them out.

Rex took in Melody's expression as she watched Fox. It clearly said he wasn't doing it right and she didn't know how to correct him. "Stop," he said.

Fox jumped and whirled around. "Rex. Uh, what are you doing here?" he asked. Great, someone else to see him make a fool of himself.

Rex held a finger up to quiet him and addressed Melody. "He wasn't doing that right was he?" he asked. Her mouth went dry and she shook her head. "Show me. Count it out," he said. She traded places with Fox. She repeated the sequence, counting out the moves.

Fox had a bad feeling about this. His stomach plunged to his knees when Rex turned his attention to him. "Let me guess, get to it," he said with a sigh.

"I'll count it out," Rex said. The first thing Fox did wrong was his stance. "Wrong," he said.

"I didn't even start yet!" Fox said.

"It's your stance. Don't mimic Mel's. You're taller and have a different center of gravity," he said and was none to gentle about positioning him just right. When he was satisfied, he began the count. He was barking at Fox like a drill sergeant.

Melody wandered over to Zara and the siblings. "He's kind of scary," she said.

"But hot, right?" Chloe said with a grin. Danny and Zara rolled their eyes.

"Totally," Melody agreed.

"I'm gonna go do something science-y so I ain't gotta hear no more of this," Danny said and headed out.

Chloe snickered. She grabbed a water bottle out of her bag and sprawled on the mat nearby. Zara and Melody joined her.



Fox was exhausted by the end of his lesson with Rex, but he was told he'd improved and well. As crappy as he felt, he was feeling good. Maybe he'd keep this up after all.

Rex had just sent Fox off to shower an change when his and Chloe's communicators beeped. He twisted his wrists. "Rex here," he said.

"Ay yi yi! Blarney has returned with a patrol of Putties," Beez said urgently.

"We're on our way," Rex said. Chloe bounced to her feet and nodded. "It's Morphin' Time!"

"Mastodon!"

-x-

Blarney arrived in Angel Grove with a veritable legion of Putties rather than just a patrol. He was bulkier and craggier than before and his lava glowed more fiercely. His sword was just as long and devastating, however. He crashed it into the ground. A fissure formed leading toward a building and crept through it's infrastructure, shattering windows and cracking interior walls.

"Ooh, Rangers! Come out, come out wherever y'are! I have a message! Whatever your up to, it will stop and you will come to heel or there be consequences! Just thought you should know!" he shouted.

Rangers began arriving. Only one of them really understood that message. The female Blue Ranger smirked under her helmet. "Let him know it's far too late," she murmured to male Red. She tapped her helmet. "I'll analyze him for weaknesses," she said loudly enough for the rest of the team to hear.

"Weaknesses? Weaknesses! I have no weaknesses!" Blarney laughed. He crashed his sword into the ground. The resulting shockwave of concussion and rolling earth knocked the Rangers off their feet. Putties swarmed, seeing their best chance to get the upper hand on the Rangers. In surprising coordination they began to break the Rangers up into small groups.

"Wait! I have something special for that lot!" Blarney waved off the Rangers. Oily black magic made several Tenga Warriors appear in front of the Putties that had rounded up the Greens, Silver and the Yellows.

"And what did we do to warrant such special treatment?" Silver wondered as he got to his feet. He summoned his CeratoSword.

"My guess is that it's all his fault," female Yellow said with a nod of her head toward male Green. "And we were a little too close to him," she added. "Oh well, nothing to it but to do it," she added. "Power Grips!"

"Right behind you. Power Daggers!" male Yellow said. Together the Yellow team moved forward and engaged the Tenga Warriors.

"She's right, that's on you," female Green told her brother. "Power Staff!"

"That just means they're worried," he said. He crossed his wrists in front of his chest. "Stygian Armor!" When his Stygian Blade appeared, he dove into the Tengas.

The Black Rangers and Pink Rangers and the Electrum Ranger was cloistered into a little group themselves.

Electrum summoned her VelociRapier. She held herself in an en guard stance and then thrust forward. Using her Rapier like a fencing foil, distracting Putties with her skills, she would then throw a jab or a kick to take them in the Z emblem.

"Power Fans!" Female Pink summoned her weapons. She whirled, spun, kicked, and occasionally her helmet front would pop open so she could knock back a Putty with her shriek before kicking it firmly in the Z.

Male Pink was jumped. The Putties were attempting to keep him on the ground by piling on top of him. Unfortunately for them, he was an accomplished tumbler who was already promoted two belts in Karate. He finally made his way to a clear spot and jumped, "Power Bow!" summoning his weapons as he did so. He spun around mid-air and began firing.

The Black Rangers summoned their weapons first thing. Female Black hacked through several Putties but one of them launched itself at her feet while she swinging at two who were coming at her. She went down and dropped her Power Axe. She curled into a ball and solidified.

Just as she knew he would, male Black came to her rescue. He swung his Power Scythe, cutting through the Putties. He held the end toward her. "Grab hold with both hands," he said, a grin in his voice. She didn't know what he had planned but she grabbed hold. He pulled her up and readjusted his grip and began alternating cartwheels as they made their way through the Putties.

Blarney clearly didn't realize that even though the male Green Ranger had some new Armor didn't mean that he was the biggest threat or that separating them wouldn't help. He made the mistake of keeping the Reds and Blues and Gold in the same group.

The Putties did. They surged forward and closed around male Red and Gold, trying to suppress them, keeping them out of the fight for as long as possible.

"Tai!" female Red gasped. "Power Sword!" she summoned. She attempted to fight her way too him but the Putties were refusing to let her.

"Son of a--Power Lance!" male Blue summoned his weapon and attempted to help his teammates as well but the Putties were having none of that.

Female Blue seethed slightly. She sent a glare in the direction of the monster. "Power Sai!" she summoned her weapon and began working her way through the Putties with more skill than she'd previously demonstrated and she hated giving that away. She couldn't bank on no one noticing.

Blarney felt the glare all the way to his bones, or is core maybe. His clay? He'd debate the meaning of

his existence at a later time. He knew something wasn't right. "No one ever believes the monsters, do they? We're just lumps of bloody clay to them with na intelligence or significance. I warned them, I did. Something's na right," he said, talking to himself. "Come on, lad, handle yerself. You can beat them. Mistress Zita amped y'up but good," he said. He nodded to himself for good measure.

A geyser of Putties suddenly shot up into the air, expelled by magical energy as Gold got to his feet shaking himself like a dog. He held his StegoMace. He rushed toward the monster, jumped and came down. Blarney quickly used his sword to block. The two weapons met and staggered them both. Blarney pushed his advantage and used the earthquake causing capabilities of the sword and crashed it in Gold, sending the alien Ranger flying backwards, creating a groove as he landed.

A thin red glow began to form in a circle around the other pile of Putties. They disintegrated and the male Red Ranger got to his feet, TyrannoSword in hand. "That was not a good idea," he said in a low, quiet voice. Sword in hand his crossed his wrists over his chest. "Power Armor!" A red digital matrix formed over his upper body briefly as golden and red armor similar to the Stygian Armor formed. The digital matrix covered his left arm as a gold and red gauntlet formed. A small red jewel appeared near his wrist.

Male Blue managed a whistle as he admired the Armor. "You done outdid yourself, Billie," he said.

"I know," she answered.

Blarney eyed this new development warily. He raised his own sword. "An honorable duel is it then, me boy?" he asked.

"No. That's only reserved for worthy opponents," Red said. His moved forward, and slashed at the monster. "This is going to be a massacre," he hissed so only the monster could hear him.

For once speechless, Blarney jerked around and tried to use the same trick on Red as his had on Gold, activating the power of his sword. Red put up his left arm. The red gem glowed and a reddish energy field formed with a tyrannosaurus head in it's center formed. It absorbed most of the blow. He still had to call on his strength. The pavement and earth beneath his feet gave way. "Lani! The Cannon!" he managed to shout.

"Right!" she agreed on a gasp. "Magnum Power Cannon!" she summoned the weapon and stood behind it. When she touched it, their Power Coins began to glow. Each barrel began to glow, starting from the outer most and going inwards until the large barrel began to glow as well.

Male Red was up to his ankles. He could hear the Cannon charging and knew he was in the way. He gritted his teeth and took a breath. He suddenly pushed back on the shield with all the strength he could muster, jumped and slashed the monster with his powered up sword several times. His left a tangle of glowing red slashes. He rolled out of the way and lay there trying to catch his breath.

"Magnum Blast!" female Red pulled the trigger as soon as her partner was clear. The individual points of energy converged as they blasted through the monster. Rock and lava exploded.

Male Red smirked under his helmet. He didn't have the energy to do much else. "You'll have to pilot the

Zord," he told female Red when she came to check on him.

"Of course. You hog all the glory and leave me to clean up after you," she said with a dainty sniff.

Blarney grew to enormous proportions. "Just imagine how much damage I can do now!" he said and raised his now enormous sword.

"Don't let that thing hit the ground!" female Blue shouted while they summoned their Zords.

When he thrust downwards, dual magical energy blasts just barely kept it from connecting. Gold was back on his feet with Electrum helping him. "Where's Rei when you need her?" she said huffily.

"Visiting her mum on important magicky business," Silver said drily. "Now let's get to it. CeratoZord!"

"VelociZord!"

"StegoZord!"

Blarney tried to use his Sword again but the Megazord was there too barely stop him, sustaining major damage in the process.

Female Red winced as her arm was burned when her console almost blew up. "Can we still combine with the Legend Zords?" she demanded of male Blue.

"Yeah, I think so. Hit the button!"

"He's trying again!" female Pink squeaked.

"Activating Magnum Alpha Megazord Configuration!" Red said and pressed the button. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. They were transported to a combined cockpit with the three Legend Rangers.

"No time to dawdle, Lani. End that thing now," Gold encouraged her.

"With pleasure," she agreed. "Magnum Dino Blast!" She lined the target up on her screen, aiming for a particularly large lava-filled crevice. She pressed the buttons on her yoke, the dino mouths come open and their tail whipped up and four points of energy where fired at the monster. Directly at that crevice.

Blarney staggered back as he began to shake. He dropped his sword and clutched his middle. "What did ye do? Me insides are a shakin'!" His blood literally began to boil and he exploded in an expulsion of lava and rock.

"Is it just me or was that scary hard?" female Yellow asked in a small voice. No one reassured her.

"Let's get out of here," Red said. The others agreed.

-X-

The after battle debrief wasn't a very long affair. While Kat and Beez made sure that Tai and Taran were going to be all right, Lani led the meeting.

"If it weren't for that armor Billie whipped up it would have been a lot harder to win this one," Wood said quietly.

Tori shook her head. "We would have found a way. I do have to say, that thing was tough though," she said.

Lammy nodded. "Even without the Reaver Orbs, Widow, Roki, Zita and Moriko are incredibly powerful and they are getting annoyed with you," she said.

"Us," Win corrected in an undertone, which she ignored.

"Too bad for them. We aren't going anywhere," Chloe declared stoutly.

"And for the record, I didn't just whip up the armor. There was hours of design, coding, test simulations not to mention fitting and compatibility programming," Mina stated. How did she usually handle these situations where her contributions were taken for granted? She didn't think she could remember.

Nathan smiled and put his hands on her shoulders. "We know, Glitch. You're amazing," he assured her.

Mina nodded, mollified. "If that's all, I do have some more work to do," she said.

Lani shook her head. "Just wondering if I can have some of that armor too," she said in a light manner.

Mina gave her deadpan look. "No," she said succinctly and broke away from Nathan to teleport.

Lani was mildly taken aback. No one else seemed to notice that wasn't just a usual cranky Billie answer. It was rude and down right mean. She cleared her throat. "That's all, guys," she said and went to check on Tai, who seemed to be just fine. Even better than Taran.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

The Palace in a quiet uproar. Widow, Roki, Zita, Moriko and Griff sat around the dining hall table. Griff was the only one eating. Not much stopped him from eating. Moriko being right didn't even rate a pause.

"What just happened?" Widow asked in a quietly tense tone. "What was *that*?"

Moriko crossed her arms over her chest and leaned back in her chair. Her mouth was a thin line. "I think that was a declaration of independence," she said finally.

Roki rubbed his forehead. "Don't beat around the bush, Moriko. If you have something to say, just come

out with it," he said and glared at his other sister.

Zita was staring straight ahead. A lead weight felt like it was pressing down on her chest.

Moriko sighed through her nose. "Very well. I warned you all that the Sword of Darkness is not to be taken lightly. Mother was thousands of years old when she used it on Tommy Oliver. *Thousands* of years of experience and she *barely* controlled the Sword.

"Yes, it's true, those of us sitting here at this table rank amongst the most powerful beings in the galaxy but we are still children. Yes, *children*," she said before anyone could object to being called a child. "Now you've unleashed it's power. It is not being controlled by you. Any of you. It's controlling itself through Wilhelmina Davis, a human girl with the mental capacities even an Eltarin scientist-sorcerer would envy.

"If I had my guess, she's using the Sword to infect and convert her friends. Can you comprehend that? Can you imagine that bunch of humans without the morality that guides them? My dear brother and sisters, you've unleashed something devastating upon the universe."

Widow hit the table with the palm of her hand. "Don't try to frighten us, Moriko. We can bring that girl to heel. I captured a goddess in a bottle if you'll recall," she said in a hiss.

"With trickery, preying upon the goodness in her heart," Zita said quietly. "Not with greater power. Moriko's right," she said and stood. She silently left the dining hall.

Roki sighed through his nose. "I refuse to admit defeat. We shall simply have to find something more powerful than the Sword of Darkness and bend it to our will," he said.

"Yes," Widow said with a nod. She got to her feet. "I shall be in the library," she said.

"I'm coming with you," Roki said. She waited while he joined her. They left the dining hall together.

"So, what are we really going to do?" Griff asked Moriko.

She looked at him with a hint of a smile. "I have to go to the Mystic Realm and find my mother and Rei. You stay. They'll continue to try to overpower Mina and the Rangers. Use your best judgment. If you think Lammy should know, tell her. The Rangers may be the only ones who can get this under control," she said quietly.

Griff frowned. He was torn between the need to protect Moriko and the need to protect his sister.

She reached out and touched his hand. "Stay. I'll be safe enough in the Mystic Realm. I'll take precautions so the shades don't notice my presence but I must find Rei," she said.

"Very well," he agreed, "But just call me and I'll be there if you need me," he said. He didn't like the thought of Moriko, or even her sister Rei, going into what was essentially enemy territory. He wondered if Sora knew how dangerous it was for Rei to go there. Probably not. He'd remedy that situation while Moriko wasn't around to nag at him that it wasn't his business. She didn't get it. Sora needed to know if he didn't all ready.

Moriko smiled. "More roast?" she said and offered him some meat. He gave a look that told her he knew she was just trying to distract him. She grinned and he played along, taking the meat and letting the matter drop.

-x-

## **Dark Dimension**

Mina had her back turned to her comrades. She had Tai, Sora and Winter. Three of their strongest fighters besides Taran and Lammy who would be dealt with when she figured out a way. Like Win, she was inclined to think that Lammy might willingly join them, but she needed a contingency plan. She had her eye on Rex, Chloe and Danny next, though Wood was one of her best friends. Maybe him next. Well, almost next. She pulled a gold medal out of her pocket.

It was an Olympic medal for Archery. It had belonged to Nathan's grandfather, the one who taught him how to use a bow. It was his most prized possession. She rubbed her thumb over the embossed surface. She silently summoned the Sword of Darkness. She touched the tip of the Sword to the Medal. Inky smog draped around it and was absorbed into its shiny surface. "Come to me, my King," she summoned quietly.

"Did you say something, my Queen?" Autumn asked.

Mina turned. "Prepare yourselves to greet your King," she told them.

They scrambled to their feet. There was a bright flash as Nathan teleported in. He brushed his hair out of his face. How on Earth could he stand that? The emo fringe definitely had to go. "Generals. Captain," he greeted them.

They gave him minute bows. "My King," they murmured in unison.

Finally his gaze caught Mina's. "My Queen," he greeted in a low voice.

Mina held out a hand. "Come," she beckoned. The others kept their heads lowered as he passed them to take her hand. "You all may go," she said without looking to see if they complied. She led him out of the main hall to her bedchamber.

They didn't all leave, however. They were mildly surprised by Mina's choice in King.

"It's going to kill me to keep my lips zipped on that one," Sora declared. Autumn giggled. Even evil, they were still themselves.

Tai rolled his eyes. "You gossip more than a thirteen-year-old girl," he said.

"So does she," Win said and pointed a thumb at Autumn. She gave him a glare.

"Go home," Tai told them. They gave him little salutes and teleported. He teleported home and knew

immediately that he was there alone. Concerned, he dashed to Grandpa's room. It was empty. He wandered down to the kitchen. There was a note stuck to the fridge with a magnet.

It was written in Japanese.

*"Grandson,  
I've gone to the mountains until you sort yourself out.  
Grandpa"*

Tai crumpled the note in his hand. Grandpa would understand one day. He went to his room. He had to.

**-xEnd Chapter 14x-**



## 15 - New Year's Evil

Rex was enjoying a chocolate shake at the Youth Center. He wasn't in training anymore this year, plus it was almost New Year's Eve. He figured he could afford just one little, itty-bitty triple chocolate fudge milk-shake. He was studying an advanced Kung Fu manual and generally enjoying the peace and quiet.

Manny scooted into the booth across from him. He glanced over the edge of his book. "Yes?" he asked.

"Saw you with the chocolate. I was just checking to see if you weren't suicidal or something," she answered.

"Why, because Nathan won the meet? That was over a week ago and I'm fine. You people act like he's never beaten me before," he grouched. Truth be told, however, that was one tough meet. But, he didn't begrudge Nathan the win. "Why are you here bothering me anyway?" he asked.

Manny shrugged. "I've been abandoned in favor of boys," she said with a pout.

Rex chuckled. "Right, Danny and Chloe got in from New York this morning, didn't they?" he said. He already knew that Tai and Lani were at some matinee marathon of kung fu movies. Tai had somehow found one of the few girls who thought that qualified as a date.

Manny nodded. "I came in to grab a café latte when I saw you sitting here all by your lonesome," she teased him.

"Well, I am hardly one to deny myself the company of pretty girls. Grasshopper! Get Manny a café latte!" he called out loudly.

"Yes, seifu," Fox all but growled at him from the counter he was manning. He ignored the twins giggling at him. Rex he could handle. Ever since he put himself in charge of his training, he'd taken to calling him Grasshopper. In retaliation, Fox called him seifu. It was Autumn and Winter that were grating on his nerves. Autumn had had this big brainstorm about a Christmas party in the Youth Center. Two days before Christmas. And made him see to it. Spring and Summer did the best they could to help. Somehow it managed to not be a disaster.

Winter wasn't any better. He'd been leaving the finances piling up and Fox finally had a go at them the night before. He couldn't imagine what was up with his cousins. They were also A.W.O.L. today, too. No one else seemed to notice anything amiss. Perhaps he did because he was closer to the problem. He just wished he understood the problem.

Thoughts banging around in his head, he took the café latte to the booth.

"Thanks," Manny said and smiled up at him. Ordinarily he'd take a moment to appreciate the smile from a girl as pretty as Manny, but today he was too distracted.

"You look beat. Why don't you pull up a chair and sit a minute," Rex said with a frown.

"No time. With Rei off doing God knows what, Zack's day off and Win and Autumn in crazy town, someone has to pick up the slack around here," he said and already started back toward the counter.

"Turn that scrawny butt of yours around and get back here to explain that," Rex said.

"No offense, seifu, but it has nothing to do with you," Fox said and kept going.

Rex bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from responding. It really did have to do with him if two Power Rangers were acting out of character. He made a mental note to check in with Lammy and Taran when they get back from Kansas. If anyone else noticed Win and Autumn acting off, it would be those two.

"You're not leaving it at that are you?" Manny asked with a grin.

"Of course not," Rex answered and went back to his book.

-x-

Sora had the distinct feeling he was being followed. He'd left his apartment building on his way to the Youth Center. He hadn't gone far when the air on the back of his neck stood on end. He spun around, splitting into three.

"What if I'd been some sad sack human? You'd have scared the life out of me just then," Griff stated from where he stood. He hadn't been trying to sneak at all. It was just his natural gait. He was incognito. He wore biker boots, jeans, a tee shirt and a faded black hoodie. His long hair was pulled back at the nape of his neck. His stance was relaxed but he could spring into action at a moment's notice.

Sora didn't recombine. The three of him narrowed their eyes at him. "What are you doing here?" the middle him asked.

"We need to talk. About our girls," Griff said.

"Rei's visiting her mother," Sora-on-the-right said as the three of him shrugged.

Griff's face hardened slightly. He shook his head. "I was right. You don't know. She isn't just in the Mystic Realm visiting her mother. She's risking her life by going into the Mystic Realm. In order for her to go unnoticed she cannot use magic for anything and whatever she's doing there has to be far more important than 'visiting her mother' for her to go there," he said.

Sora recombined without meaning to. "What are you talking about? Why wouldn't she tell me?" he demanded. For a brief moment his eyes flashed darkly.

"Maybe she was more afraid to stay here. Moriko was right, wasn't she? Mina's using the Sword to convert other Rangers. Fantastic," Griff growled. He became just a little less relaxed.

"That doesn't matter," Sora said dismissively. "What do you mean by Rei risking her life to go to her mother?" he demanded.

"The Mystic Realm is enemy territory for the Repulsa triplets. The beings that combined them into one person want them dead now that they're three again. Whenever they use magic, shades appear and watch them. They aren't allowed to interfere with them in the human realm, but if they try to use magic in the Mystic Realm," Griff shook his head. "And, this *does* matter. Because of *this* Moriko went there to find Rei," he added. It wasn't his style to threaten people. He said what he had to say and then he disappeared.

Sora stared at the spot where Griff had been. In truth, he hadn't let himself think about Rei the last week or so. Now she might be in danger. He felt conflicted. He had no idea what or where the Mystic Realm even was. He just knew that was Rita Repulsa had made her home after the Z-Wave turned her good.

He'd give it a couple more days then he'd try and get Griff's attention. He'd storm the place if he had to, with or without Mina's permission.

-x-

New Year's Eve rolled around and there were things beginning to happen. There was supposed to be an event at the Youth Center and a countdown for the New Year. Fox had been working diligently on that since after the near Christmas debacle they weren't even supposed to have. New Year's Eve was supposed to have been the big event. Therefore, he gave himself the day off and Autumn and Win could either work or let the place go to pot.

He stopped just short of telling them that. The twins could pass the message along if they were so inclined.

Autumn was annoyed that Fox had disappeared on them. Taran was supposed to get back into town today and she was peeved that she had to work instead of getting to see him. There was no guarantee that he'd drop by before the party that night. Win got to go see Lammy. It wasn't fair.

She was pouting pretty hard when a familiar face came into the Youth Center, She blinked just to make sure she'd seen correctly. "AJ?" she asked.

A young man a year younger than her brother, Austin John Scott had also been Win's best friend in school. He was a taller, leaner version of his big brother, Jason. They had the same dark hair and warm brown eyes. He ran fingers through his hair to fix where his motorcycle helmet plastered it to his skull. "None other," he said.

With a mental sigh, she came around the counter and gave him a hug. "It's been ages. Win's not here," she said.

"I came to visit Jason and Randi for a day or so and heard about the party tonight. Figured I'd catch up with Win before then. See if he ever cut his hair," he said.

Autumn didn't get a chance to answer or explain where Win was. The twins spotted him. Whether they

admitted it to anyone else but each other, he was their first crush and even if they grew out it, which was still in debate, they were excited to see him. Autumn scowled at their backs and went to serve a customer.

-X-

Mina hadn't been idle during the holidays but she had found converting more of the others to be difficult. Not Wood, though. There were perks to being long times friends with someone. You knew the things they cared for most. In Wood's case it was simple. It was a mint out of box limited edition of the Blue Astro Ranger action figure.

Rex was proving to be difficult. She realized that while everyone seemed to know him, no but Tai really *knew* him. Even that wasn't helpful. Tai couldn't name an object he seemed to hold above anything else. None of his trophies; they were just things. He didn't wear jewelry that held any significance; he didn't wear jewelry at all. Clothes were just clothes.

She was beginning to see why Tai was suddenly eager to rip into him. He was freaking annoyingly a good guy who liked people more than things. She stuck him on the list of people to find other avenues of conversion for.

Now that Chloe and Danny were back from New York, she was determined to get them. They weren't home when she went over. That was good. Their mom let her in on her way out the door. She was on her way to an office thing for New Year's Eve. That she had to set up.

"Go on in dear. I'm sure Danny will show up soon," she said as she breezed out the door.

Mina closed the door behind Mrs. Kennedy. She headed upstairs. Chloe was an easy read. Everyone had chipped in to get her a new camera for Christmas. They'd given it to her before she left for New York so it'd been out of reach. Until now. Mina headed up the stairs. She knew the Kennedy house as well as she knew her own. Maybe even better.

She entered Chloe's room. She didn't have to hunt for the camera. Chloe had an entire section of her room dedicated to photography. Her camera was practically on display. She summoned the Sword of Darkness. She touched the tip of it to the camera. Inky smog billowed around the camera and was absorbed into it.

Satisfied with her work, Mina started to leave the room. The door burst open.

"She said I could use it for a--" whatever else Fox was about to say died instantly because just as quickly as he opened the door, a rather nasty looking sword was pointed at his face. "If this is about all the inappropriate cracks about you and your laptop; I sincerely apologize," he babbled.

"Ey what's--uh, Billie?" Danny moved up behind Fox. "Yeah, Fox, back away slowly," he said quietly as he and his best friend eyed each other, sizing up the situation and playing out the best move now. Danny muttered a curse and grabbed Fox's shoulder. He teleported both of them. "Lock down mode. Priority code Oscar Mike Foxtrot Golf. Daniel Kennedy verification code; Delta Kilo nine-seven-five-five," he called out as soon as they arrived.

Muted alarms began to go off. "Ay yi yi! Danny! What's going on?" Beez asked, her hologram appearing.

Fox cried out and scrambled away. "Wh-what?! Where did she--how did we--where the h--" he couldn't even form the questions and Danny wasn't in an answering mood as he dashed from console to console.

"I need Dr. O, Beez. And Holly. Until I know who we can trust and who we can't, ain't nobody else gettin' in except you and me and who goes on the approved list," Danny explained.

"I am already in the city. I will find Tommy," Beez answered from a monitor.

Billy came out of his lab. "What's going on?" he asked. "Why are we on Priority One Lockdown?" he asked. He noticed Fox and blinked. Fox gave him a blank sort of wave.

"Sorry about him. He wasn't safe. Had to bring him along," Danny explained. "Billie had the Sword of Darkness," he added. "And, if my guess is right, she ain't the only one under it's influence. When Dr. O gets here, I need you to see you can't use him to figure out a way of detecting it or something," he instructed.

"Beez, teleport Tommy directly to my lab," Billy said and dashed off.

"Don't explain anything and continue referring to me as if I'm not even here. Thanks. Thanks so much," Fox said. He paced slightly, wrapping his head around the fact that one of his friends was obviously a Power Ranger.

"Beez, can you handle him?" Danny said absently. He'd apologize later, he was trying his very best to take the Command Center offline and change as many codes as possible.

Holo-Beez turned toward Fox. "Please, be calm. I know this must seem strange right now. I am Beta Z. If you'll follow me, I'll take you somewhere you can sit quietly," she said.

"Screw that. What can I do to help?" Fox said stubbornly.

"Maybe he can. He's an outsider, he may have noticed things we were too close to see," Danny said.

Holly arrived in a flash making Fox jump. "What do you need me to do?" she asked immediately.

"Codes. Change as many as you can. Billie might be able to crack mine more easily than yours," Danny instructed. Holly nodded and got on that.

"We can also let in Melody and Zara," Danny murmured and added them to the list. He had a feeling any of the elders were safe but he didn't want to take any more chances than he already had.

"And Taran. He'll be immune to the influence of the Sword of Darkness," Beez pointed out.

"What about Lammy?" Holly asked.

Beez shook her head. "I cannot say. Perhaps Taran would know," she said.

"Right, Taran, Mel and Zara. Get them here," Danny said. He sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. He stared at Fox for a long minute. "Right off the top of your head. Power Rangers. Take a guess," he prompted.

Fox rubbed the bridge of his nose. "You and Billie obviously. That Taran guy, yeah, I can totally see that. Umm, oh crap. Autumn and Win," he said as things started to make so much sense with his cousins. "I think you can also safely put them on the 'Sword of Darkness' list. Yeah," he said.

"Noted. I have arrived with Tommy. Billy is analyzing him now," Beez reported, confusing the crap out of Fox. "Wasn't she standing there?"

Deciding to tackle one problem at a time he continued. "Oh, Tai. Definitely a Ranger. Rex, too. Your sister. I should have guessed that ages ago when she wanted to take on those gray things for a camera," he said with a sigh.

While he was thinking, Melody, Zara and Taran arrived.

Danny jotted down a list of names for Fox to peruse. "Anyone you think hasn't been acting out of whack would be good," he said before addressing Taran and the girls to fill them in on the situation.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow felt almost triumphant as she thought up a course of action for getting Mina under control. She found a powerful spell she was infusing into a monster. she just hoped it would work. Somehow, Mina had managed to block their access to the Dark Dimension, which was intolerable. When she managed to get her hands on the girl, she wasn't going to try to control her. She was going to put her down.

The fact that Moriko had been right had left Zita in a quiet state that was unnerving. Moriko and Griff suddenly disappearing didn't bode well either.

Roki was alternating between tearing down the library and chasing down contacts. He was up to something and she wasn't sure what. He said he didn't want to get her hopes up if it didn't pan out.

"Finster! Is Slumbuhbye ready yet?" she demanded as she stalked into his lab.

"Nearly so, my lady. Would you like to perform the spell now?" he asked in his acquiescent tone.

"Indeed I would," she said and walked to the half formed lump of clay and began to chant.

-x-

Lammy was mildly surprised when Winter knocked on her apartment door. She'd been meaning to have him over to show off the place but things kept coming up. Then she went on the trip to Kansas with Taran and when they finally got back, Griff showed up to take up residence on her couch without

explaining why.

She shoed her brother into the bedroom and gave him a warning to keep quiet. She opened her door and gave Winter a smile. "Well, hi there," she greeted him and let him in the door.

He came in and looked around. He let out a low whistle. "Wow, nice digs," he said.

She beamed. "I know! It's so fantastic! My own place, my home. I can't remember the last time I stayed in one place for longer than a couple of weeks and now I'm nesting. It's amazing and surprisingly scary at the same time," she gushed without meaning to.

Winter grinned. "That's great but to be honest I didn't come here to see the apartment. I came here to see you," he said.

She looked at him, pushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "You see me almost every day," she pointed out.

He reached out, wrapping an arm around her waist to pull her closer. "For breif snatches at the Youth Center. Do you really think that's enough?" he asked quietly.

She smiled up at him. "It's really not," she agreed. He smirked. "What do you suggest?" she asked.

"I could spend much more time over here."

"What about the Youth Center?" she asked.

His face tightened just slightly. "It'll survive," he answered.

She gave him just sweetest smile. "Wrong answer," she said and broke away from him. "How long have you been evil again?" she demanded, putting her fists on her hips.

Win grinned. "Awhile. So, my complete and utter antipathy for that place came through, did it? I'll have to work on that," he said with a sigh. "Join us. You never wanted to be a Power Ranger anyway. You, yourself claim you aren't Good. What's the problem?" he asked with a frown.

"You're the problem. After all the trouble I went through to turn you good again. Undone! Sure you have more than two brain cells to rub together this time, but you still aren't *you*," she said. "The Winter I risked everything for is not only *Good* but a good guy. I can tell just by looking at you you've become a Grade-A jerk. Don't worry though, I'm sure I'll figure out how to fix you again. For now: **Be gone**," she said and held out her hand.

Winter felt a strange jerk as he was banished from her apartment.

"Get out here now!" Lammy shouted at her brother.

Unperturbed, Griff came into the living room. "You called?"

"Tell me everything," she demanded. With a sigh, he obliged.

-x-

Tai and Lani strolled through the park. They'd had a good time with a picnic even if it was a little nippy. Still though she couldn't put her finger on what was different lately. Something was. Pushing that aside she smiled up at him.

"Did you have a good time?" he asked.

She nodded. "It was lovely. Thank you," she said with a smile.

Tai slipped an arm around her waist and pulled her close to him. He leaned down and kissed her. She was surprised but didn't complain.

Someone else complained for her. "Hey! What the heck is going on here?"

Lani gasped and pulled away. She saw her brothers heading toward them. Stocky and wide, Pua was the eldest and as hot headed as any Hawaiian could hope to be. Keoni was the middle brother, a little taller and leaner than Pua but also not quite as hot-headed. That wasn't saying much. Noa was the youngest and in the same class as Tai. He was also the tallest and leanest of the brothers. He was more of laid back surf bum than a hot head.

Pua was barreling toward them like a volcanic eruption; Keoni hot on his heels. Looking like he wanted to be anywhere else, Noa trailed behind them. Since her two elder brothers were in college and no longer in the house, only Noa knew about her and Tai. This was not particularly how she wanted the other two to find out about him. Not because she was embarrassed to be caught kissing Tai but because they were so overbearing.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest and watched them come.

"Lani! Who is this guy? What's going on here? Hey, you. Keep your hands off my sister," Pua made to push at Tai and Lani shouted his name. It all happened in a blink. Pua was a highly trained practitioner of Tae Kwon Do and Judo. He was award winning and confident in his ability to handle any situation, especially putting a guy sniffing around his sister in his place. He was wrong.

In a fluid motion, Tai stepped aside, wrapped an arm around Pua's, kicked his feet out from under him and put him on the ground. He used his arm as leverage, holding him in place. Pua cried out in pain.

Lani gasped again. "Tai! Let him up. What's gotten into you?" she demanded. Tai cut his eyes toward her. Something dark flashed in them. Dread licked down her spine. "Let him up now," she said in a firmer tone.

Noa's eyes were about to pop out of his head. Naturally he'd known that Tai was highly skilled. He hadn't warned Pua because he'd been looking forward to seeing what would happen when he went all Pua on him. This he hadn't expected. Keoni made to step forward but his little brother stopped him. "Not a good idea," he said. Keoni glared at him. Noa held firm.



Tai let Pua loose and stepped back. "Don't get in my face again. I may not be so gentle next time," he said.

Pua got to his feet, rubbing his arm, his face red.

"That's enough! All of you. You three go that way. Now!" Lani said and pointed. She knew how to handle her brothers when she needed to.

"Come on," Noa said, backing up his sister. He had to all but physically drag his stewing brothers off.

Lani and Tai stood tensely watching them go. "Don't even think about touching me," Lani said when he made a move to take her arm. "Just stay away," she said and backed up a few paces.

"I'm not going to hurt you, little red fae," he said.

"As if that matters. Just stay away," she repeated. She backed up some more and teleported.

-X-

Billy rushed into the Power Chamber; Tommy was right behind him. "I think I have it. I discovered a subatomic residue. barely there anymore after all these years but it has a distinct signature," he was saying even as he slid behind a console and began feeding information from a chip into the Command Center systems.

"So you thinkin' that if we program the Command Center to recognize he signature, we can block any affected Rangers from gettin' in. Brilliant," Danny said and helped speed along the process.

"Changes made. Signature recorded," Beez announced.

"Start calling everyone in. Let's hope this works," Danny said.

Lani appeared. "I think Tai's evil," she burst out immediately.

"Yep," Fox confirmed without glancing up from his list. "He's been a bit of butt wad lately when no one else is around," he said.

"Well, that ain't great news," Danny said.

Lani glanced from Fox to Danny. "I've missed something huge, haven't I?" she asked. Before he could answer, people began to appear.

"Attempted breach," Beez reported as Tori appeared.

She looked around with a frown. "Chloe was right behind me," she said and turned in a circle, looking for her friend.

"Attempted breach. Attempted breach," Beez reported.

Danny cursed. "That was Wood and Nathan," he said grimly and rubbed his face.

Manny appeared followed shortly by Lammy with Griff in tow. Things were so bad, no one even bothered to be surprised that he was there. Elders began arriving.

"Attempted breach," Beez reported.

"That was Sora," Holly said.

"Attempted breach."

"And Autumn just tried," Danny said.

"Is there anyone unaccounted for?" Tommy asked.

"Rex, Jason, Justin and Carlos," Danny answered.

"Justin and Carlos are on patrol. Jason's probably out of town. I don't know about Rex," Tommy said.

"So far I've been pretty much spot on. I don't think Rex has been affected," Fox said.

"Then where is he? And what's going on?" Lani demanded.

"Well, that's why I brought him along," Lammy said and pointed at her brother. Griff shifted under the scrutiny of so many Power Rangers.

"It's all Zita's fault," he stated finally.

-X-

A Power Ranger fell on Rex. He was leaving the Dojo where'd been practicing a bit of Kung Fu in order to teach Fox. He'd just left when the alert came in for everyone to report to the Command Center. He ducked into the alley so he could safely teleport and a Power Ranger appeared in the sky and fell on him.

The big man rolled off of him. "Sorry about that, kid. I got the geosynchronistic coordinates a bit off didn't I?" he said as he got to his feet. He held an arm down to help Rex to his feet.

"Just a bit," Rex answered drily as he eyed the black armored Ranger. "So, why is the fabled Phantom Ranger falling out of the sky?" he asked.

The Phantom Ranger seemed to stare at him for a long time. "It's not quite time answer that yet," he said finally. Then he disappeared as quickly as he'd appeared.

Rex stared at where he'd disappeared for a few moments then teleported into the Command Center just

in time to hear Griff tell everyone about Zita, Widow and Roki's plan to turn Billie evil with the Sword of Darkness and use her genius to destroy the Rangers.

"Moriko tried to talk them out of it but they wouldn't listen. Turns out she was right, now she's off risking her life looking for Rei and I'm stuck here," he complained.

Rex strode forward and looked at the list Danny had compiled. He whistled. "She is an evil genius. I bet she got Autumn first because of her ability to read auras. She probably went after Win at the same time for both convenience and his newly alien skills. Tai would have been the next logical choice with his skills. Sora, too," he said.

"Why Wood and Nathan? Why not you? Or me?" Lani asked quietly.

"They're her friends. Being evil doesn't mean you stop caring about the people important to you," Lammy answered.

"Yeah," Danny agreed. "She was in my house. She was after me and Chloe. Fox threw a wrench in her works," he said.

Rex glanced to where the surprisingly Zen Fox was mulling over a piece of paper. "You look pretty calm for someone who just learned almost everyone he met in his new town is a Power Ranger," he commented.

"Look at this face, seifu. This is my surprised face," Fox declared, pointing at his deadpan expression.

Rex couldn't help but grin. "Now, what are we doing to do about getting friends back on track?"

The monster alert sounded. "A monster and Putties have appeared in downtown Angel Grove. He's putting people to sleep," Beez reported.

There was a quiet in the room.

"That'd probably be Widow attempting to regain control of Mina. That's what she calls herself," Griff said, interrupting the silence.

"Well, we don't have much of a choice," Rex said.

"Right," Lani agreed. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-x-

Slumbuhbye left sleeping humans in his wake. He was a grotesque star monster with a blue nightcap with pink ponies all over it and matching footie pajamas. He had a face that strangely resembled Spongebob Squarepants. His eyes were closed and his expression was sleepy as he toddled along. He would stop and yawn and when he exhaled he emitted gold dust that put anything that once inhaled it put a person to sleep.

Putties sleepily toddled along behind him.

"Hold it right there!"

Slumbuhbye paused and seemed to look around lazily. "Who's there?" he asked in a sleepy childish sort of voice. "Is it...the Power Rangers?" he asked playfully as he spotted them. "Go play with them, Putty Patrol," he said.

The Putties were suddenly alert. They split into groups and attacked the Rangers.

Putties began to move in erratic pattern around Yellow, not allowing her speed to give her the upper hand. If she tried she'd end up barreling into one or more of them. "Power Grips!" she summoned. "By the way, guys. I'm a cheerleader, too," she said in her best cheer voice. She began doing a routine, using her Grips as pom-poms, turning cartwheels and round-off and popping up with a high kick or going down into the splits.

Blue surveyed the Putties trying to get at him. "You S.O.B.s picked the wrong day to screw wit' me," he told them. "Power Lance!" he summoned. The Putties attacked. They shouldn't have done that. He blasted them with force field and stabbed them with the Power Lance. Sometime he even allowed himself the satisfaction of pounding on one for a moment.

Putties moved in very close to Pink not allowing her room to summon her Fans. She was small and compact, so she was holding her own by using her size and agility to her advantage. She'd jab, kick, spin, high kick, sweep kick but they kept closing in on her. The front of her helmet popped open and she shrieked so loudly Putties in front of her grabbed their heads and stumbled into others, causing a chain reaction. "Power Fans," she summoned croakily. She may have over did the shriek a little bit. At least she had her Fans now.

Gold was in a bit of a jam. When the Putties came at him, one of them threw some sort of dust in his face that made him sneeze. He felt foggy and disoriented. He was holding his own, but even with his StegoMace out, he felt like his usual strength and speed weren't on his usual level. Basically, he'd been reduced to the efficiency of a human being. His spidy senses were out of whack as well and the Putties were taking advantage of that by sneaking up behind him to try and trip him or jump on his back.

Electrum noticed her brother's trouble but she was having enough of her own. One of the Putties had used the dust on her as well. She'd never once wished to be anything other than she was so to be rendered essentially human was aggravating. "Dormite spell," she muttered thickly. A lucky Putty managed to knock her over.

A large black quickly ended that Putty. "Decided to stick my nose in," Griff said as he helped his sister to her feet. He was in full armor.

"Good thing. Widow infused that monster with the Dormite spell," she said. "Everyone be careful not to breath in any of the gold dust he emits," she warned her team. "It'll put you to sleep." She looked at her brother. "Let's go help Taran," she said.

"If we must," Griff agreed and he went to help the Gold Ranger.

Black filed away the information in the back of his mind even as he attempted to negotiate his way through the pack of Putties. He also kept an eye on the monster as it toddled around. He'd managed to summon his Power Scythe but they managed to stay out of reach without allowing him to get anywhere. He narrowed his eyes. He paused and allowed the Scythe to disappear. "We're going to do it the old fashioned way," he said.

There was a wary pause then he sprang into action. He ran forward and jumped, powering both feet into a Putty. He landed on the ground as it disintegrated and was immediately into his next move. He actually grabbed one of them and used it as a weapon against the others before striking it in the Z and moving on.

Red was trying to get to the monster but the Putties were adamantly defending it. Before she could summon her weapon, two Putties actually grabbed her arms and stretched her at least a foot in either direction. She cried out in a pain. She had a limit to how far she could stretch but she knew something they didn't know. An elastic band stretched too far eventually snaps back. She pulled back and the Putties collided, ending each other. "Power Sword!" she summoned and began to slice her way through the Putties.

She made her way through and ran toward the monster. "That's enough!" she cried out.

Slumbuhbye turned toward her slowly. "Don't take that tone with me, Ranger. You'll make me angry. You won't like me when I'm angry," he said and gave a giggle at his words.

"Then we'll both be ticked off," she said and lunged forward, slashing him several times.

He grabbed her blade and pushed her back. His eyes slowly began to open. They were massively bloodshot and had electric blue irises that were unnerving. His face changed from one of sleepiness to one of face. "I warned you!" he roared in a shocking deep voice. Bright light and electricity shot out of his eyes. Arcs caught her and each of the Rangers. They were hurled away as the area around them was devastated by the Power.

-X-

The Command Center was quietly tense, except for the furious tapping of keys from Holly. Fox peered over her shoulder. "What are you doing?" he asked. He watched code fly by. He understood the language but he didn't understand the context.

"Replicating the Power Armor by fitting the schematic over a digital representation of Lani so that I can create a physical copy within the Morphing Grid. Once created she will be able to summon her own Power Armor." she answered.

"Right, of course," he said. Now he had the context.

He heard Melody gasp and looked at one of the view screens just in time to see the world explode and taking the Power Rangers with it. Zara's face was a tense mask.

"And done. Lani? Are you still alive? If you are, you can summon the Power Armor," Holly said urgently into the communication systems.

Fox sincerely hoped they were still alive.

-x-

## **Dark Keep**

Mina gathered everyone at the Keep when it became clear that their secrets were known. Her companions were not happy. Neither was she.

Winter's pride was stung by Lammy's rejection and her banishing him from her apartment. Autumn was both glad she didn't have to pretend anymore but also sad they were found out before everyone was on their side.

Sora was worried about Rei.

Chloe and Wood were disappointed that Danny had gotten away before Mina could get him.

Tai wasn't worried. Yes, he was a little stung by Lani's behavior but it was nothing he didn't expect. He also had faith that Mina had a plan.

Nathan walked to her and touched her on the shoulder. "What about the monster?" he asked.

Mina had been observing the battle. "I'm certainly not going let Widow and Roki destroy our friends. We'll help if we need to," she said.

"Does this change our plans?" Chloe asked.

"Change them? No. Sets them back a little but I factored in that I might get found out eventually. They've blocked me from the Command Center but that's only a matter of time," she said. "None of you worry. The New World Order shall include our friends. I promise," she assured them.

That mollified some of them. They all knew her genius. If anyone could figure out a plan from there it was Wilhelmina Davis.

-x-

Slumbuhbyes eyes were beginning to drift shut after his attack but the Rangers got to their feet. They'd each lost their Morphs and Griff was all but holding up Taran and Lammy. His eyes bulged. "How? That's not possible!" he said in his cavernous tone. "I'll just have to put you Rangers to sleep!" he growled and began to blow goldish dust in their direction.

Danny threw up a force field. "Holly came through with a Hail Mary. Use it!" he said to Lani.

She was way ahead of him. She had her cuffs out. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus!" She morphed.

She crossed her wrists in front of her chest. "Power Armor!" A red digital matrix formed over her upper body briefly as golden and red armor formed. The digital matrix covered her left arm as a gold and red gauntlet formed. A small red jewel appeared near her wrist. Her Power Sword appeared in her right hand.

She left behind the safety of the force field and ran. Slumbuhbye unleashed another energy attack at her but she threw up her left arm. The red energy shield with the Tyrannosaurus-Rex face in the middle appeared and deflected the energy, bouncing it back toward him. He staggered. She got in close enough to stab in him in one eye and slash him several more times before the shield powered out.

Slumbuhbye sparked, his remaining eye bulged even more. "You haven't seen the last of me, Rangers!" he shouted and disappeared before they could regroup enough to summon the Magna Cannon.

Red stumbled and lost her Morph. She'd taken his entire attack and wasn't exactly the better for it. Manny sped to her side and helped her not fall over. "Let's get back. We need to decide what we're going to do. Not only about this monster but about our friends," she said.

Rex nodded. The ragged little group teleported back to the Command Center. They'd each dedicated themselves to fighting evil but none of them expected evil to be their closest friends and loved ones.

Needless to say it was not a happy New Year.

**-xEnd Chapter 15 - To Be Continuedx-**

## 16 - Phantom Phenomena

A tense couple of days passed. The people affected by Slumbuhbye were still asleep. The divide between the two sets of Rangers was palpable.

After the effects of the Dormite spell wore off of Lammy and Taran, they warded each remaining Ranger against the Sword of Darkness. They also warded the elder Rangers, Fox, Melody and Zara.

Danny had moved out of his house with the stern admonishment to his sister that if she harmed a hair on their mother's head, he'd forget they were kin. She'd glared at him for even suggesting such a thing. The story for her mother was that he was on a camping trip with some of the guys. He was crashing at the Command Center along with Fox, who was too skeeved to stay at the Youth Center, though he worried about Nanna Mai and the twins.

Danny was jangle of anger, tension, hurt and confusion. Rex was distracting him by channeling his emotions into also learning Kung Fu. Fox felt sorry for the guy. All his friends and his sister had been turned to the Darkside. At least he still had Holly. They'd look up every now and then to see Jason and Randi's brother watching them with an odd look on his face.

Rex and his two pupils had just finished a major training session that left Danny feeling drained in a good way. He sent them off to shower. He did a few more reps and exited Room 3. AJ was in the main entrance answering the door. Rex had noticed him observing them earlier. They were there at an odd time of day when there were no classes in session and hardly anyone was there.

Rex was about to walk on when he saw who was at the door delivering food. He stepped back into the shadows hoping Winter hadn't noticed him.

AJ grinned. "Win! I was beginning to think you were avoiding me," he said had he took the food his sister had ordered for herself and her two brothers. He set it aside and attempted to hug one of his oldest friends.

"I was but Nanna made me take the delivery since Fox left," Win answered. "That'll be twenty-two eighty-five," he said and waited for the payment.

AJ narrowed his eyes at Win but fished the money out of his wallet. He gave him a twenty and a five. "Keep the change for your delightful attitude," he said dryly.

Winter snapped and lashed out attempting to take the other man's head off. AJ reacted just as quickly, throwing up a block and jumping back.

Rex slid between them. "What are you doing? You have your money. Get out of here, Winter. You aren't welcome," he said.

"This has nothing to do with you Rex. Stay out of it," Winter said savagely and exoskeleton began



forming on various parts of his skin. He moved with preternatural speed, grabbed Rex's shirt and threw him across the entrance hall.

AJ was in motion again. Unfortunately for him, Winter was now an alien hybrid and had the same strength, speed and agility of Taran and Lammy. They traded a few blows but AJ couldn't seem to adapt quickly enough. Winter grabbed one of his arms, twisted it and dislocated the shoulder. He kicked him in the ribs and sent him crashing into a wall.

AJ grunted in pain. He was pretty sure his rib just broke but he could handle the arm. He positioned it just right and rammed his shoulder into the wall forcing it to pop back into place. "If this about Savannah Lowell, I thought we cleared that up," he said painfully.

Winter didn't answer. He began to come at AJ again. Almost unconcerned, AJ took the tiger stance. He didn't have any other choice. Whatever was up with Winter wasn't normal. "Unleash the Tiger!" He made an arm movement and from within him a spirit tiger, white with black stripes, jumped crashing into Winter. It held him on the floor and roared in his face.

"Enough!" Jason shouted, coming down from office.

AJ glanced at his brother and the tiger paced off of Winter and disappeared. Winter got to his feet and glowered at the Scott brothers. He turned on his heel and left the dojo.

Rex got to his feet, mildly in awe. Two sets of dark eyes swung toward him. "I'm off to the showers," he said.

"Rex," Jason said.

"If I need to know, you'll tell me," Rex said. "I have enough crap to worry about. Spirit tigers don't even make the top ten at the moment. Proceed with the reaming of your little brother," he said and left before Jason could stop him.

Jason bit back his grin then sent his brother a look.

AJ sighed. "Let's go have the reaming upstairs while we eat and you bandage my ribs," he suggested.

Jason grunted. He grabbed the bags of food and made his brother lead him upstairs.

-x-

## **Dark Keep**

Nathan approached Mina as she worked diligently in her lab. He kissed the top of her head. "Whatcha working on?" he asked her, resting his chin on her head.

Mina sighed and put aside the device. "Something I was hoping I wouldn't have to use," she answered. "Hopefully it'll make them understand how much better things would be with us in charge of everything. No more war. No more poverty. No more famine. Diseases cured instead of treated so big pharma can

make money off the sick and dying," she said and turned toward him.

He smiled and knelt beside her. "They'll come around," he assured her.

Mina nodded. "I'm sure they will," she said and leaned forward to kiss him. A device began beeping. "That monster is back. We'd better go help," she said. "It's going to take all of us," she said. "Remind me when we get back to yell at Winter," she added.

Nathan gave a crooked smile. "Of course," he said.

She twisted her wrists making her Morpher appear. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-x-

Holly was busy working in the Zord Lab when the alarms went off. She wanted to be there for Lani whose boyfriend went wrong and she wanted to be there for Danny whose everyone went wrong but she also needed to do her work. For a moment she wished she could split herself into three like Sora.

Fox, who turned out to be great at fetching and carrying, had been helping her. "Uh, what's that?" he asked.

"The monster they Rangers fought the other day has returned. Beez is sending for the Rangers now I'm sure but we need to finish this. If it grows before we've completed it, they may not be able to defeat it permanently," she said.

Fox nodded. "Right," he said. Holly smiled and began bossing him around again.

-x-

Lani and Manny were indulging in shop therapy. It was helping a little, but Tai being evil didn't mean he didn't still care about her. He continued to try and talk to her. He'd call her or text or show up. It was annoying and made her want to cry. It also made her more determined to do everything in her power to change him back to good.

"Earth to Lani. Quit thinking about tall, gawky and evil. This shop I know has some of the cutest tops that would be perfect for your ironic retro rocker-girl tomboy style," Manny said.

Lani laughed and looked down at herself. "Is that what my style is?" she asked.

"Absolutely so let's go already," she said and drug her friend down the street. They rounded a corner and stopped short. In front of them people were slumped over asleep. Putties were lazily milling around and Slumbahbye, the mad, pajama wearing, star shaped monster was yawning in the midst of them.

"So much for a nice relaxing therapeutic shopping trip," Manny groaned.

Lani's face hardened. "This time, we end that thing," she said. They stashed their bags and made their Morphers appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus!"

"Smilodon!"

The two Rangers run toward the monster. Yellow skids to a stop with a gasp. "Lani! It's Mel and Zara," she said and knelt to check on the two girls. They appeared unharmed except they were fast asleep. Donuts were strewn around them.

"They must have been on a food run when he appeared," Red said. "Beez! Lock on to Mel and Zara and teleport them to the Medi-Lab," she said into her communicator.

"Ay yi yi! Taking care of it immediately," she said. Once the two girls were safely teleported away. Red and Yellow caught up with where the others had arrived to engage the Putties.

Slumbuhbye suddenly laughed and his eyes sprang open. Arcs of electricity rained down upon the combatants.

The equivalent of a person sized wrecking ball crashed into his back. The female Black Ranger bowled over him after being tossed by the male Red Ranger at full strength. He was propelled through the air and landed face down. Female Black rolled to her feet.

Each faction of Power Rangers eyed each other warily.

"Why are you here?" male Black asked quietly.

"Temporary truce. No one wants Zita, Roki and Widow to win this fight," female Blue answered.

Slumbuhbye was already back on his eyes. "You'll all pay of that!" he seethed and began his electric attack again.

"Power Armor!" the Red Rangers both summoned the armor and activated their shields while the male Blue Ranger hastily threw up a force-field.

Male Green used his phasing ability to run toward the monster, his Stygian Blade at the ready. When he was close enough, he solidified and slashed him several times. The attack stopped, giving the Red Rangers an opening to come in and all but finish him.

"Magnum Power Cannon!" male Black summoned the weapon and stood behind it. When he touched it, their Power Coins began to glow. Each barrel began to glow, starting from the outer most and going inwards until the large barrel began to glow as well. He waited until the Reds got clear. "Magnum Blast!" he pulled the trigger. The individual points of energy converged and exploded into him.

There was no lull between the explosion and Slumbuhbye's growth.

"Now that he's large he's more powerful. If you aren't in a Zord, get somewhere safe!" male Blue shouted.

"That means those of us not effected by an evil sword," female Red said. The crystal on her gauntlet

began to glow. "Magnum Alpha Megazord!" she summoned.

From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. Their pilots were teleported into an enormous combined cockpit except for the Greens and Silver.

So far, Slumbuhbye had been sleepily spreading his Dormite dust in larger doses, unconcerned with the Power Rangers. He turned toward the Megazord as it ran up to him. His eyes began to open.

"Oh, no you don't," Red murmured under her breath. "Magnum Dino Blast!" She lined the target up on her screen. This time when she pressed the buttons, not only did the dino mouths come open but their tail whipped up and four points of energy where fired at the monster.

Slumbuhbye stuttered and stumbled back, smoking and sparking but now enraged. His eyes were wide open and bulging. "You'll regret this!" he cried in a cavernous voice. He emitted his electric attack, focusing it solely upon the Megazord.

The Rangers within cried out as their consoles exploded. They were transported before the whole thing could blow.

"Welcome to the Alphamax Cannon. May I suggest firing at will," Holly's voice said over the comm system.

Mere moments after the Megazord was nearly demolished by the monster, a giant version of the Magnum Power Cannon had appeared. Red approached the center console. She grabbed the dual joysticks and targeted the monster. "Target Acquired. Firing!" She depressed the buttons. Two by two, from the outside in the points of the Alphamax Cannon began firing, hitting the monster in succession. Each hit glowed. Finally the middle barrel fired. A beam of blindingly bright light hit. The other ten points connected in a circle.

The points exploded, taking the monster out.

"Wow. Remind me to get that girl somethin' fabulous," Blue said.

"On the ground now," Red said and the Power Rangers teleported out the Cannon.

Mina's Rangers were waiting for them. "Good. You came back," she said. She held up a slim black device. She pressed a button. She and her Rangers glowed as their Morphs contorted. Her usual powersuit became a darker black and blue suit and her helmet darkened as well. Three black horns adorned it. Each of the others' usual powersuits became darker and different. Female Green even became Violet.

"What the--"

Black's comment was cut short as his Morph failed when she pushed another button. All their Morph's failed.

"Billie! What are you doing?" Danny demanded.

"Cutting you off from the Morphing Grid. The Power Coins are useless now. Until you come to your senses and join us, none of you can Morph. You may call me Dark Triumph. My Generals; Dark Tyrant, Dark Drake and Dark Sword. My Captains; Dark Master and Dark Saber," she said, indicating in turn to what used to be male Red, Male Green, Silver, female Black, and male Yellow. They gave little bows.

"Oh, Nath doesn't get a fancy title?" Danny asked.

"Of course he does," Triumph answered. She walked over to him and slid a hand over his shoulder. He wrapped an arm around her waist. "He's my king, Dark Terror," she added. "I'll give you time to think it over. I'd rather there not be a confrontation. That's up to each of you," she said and she and the others teleported out.

The now unmorphed Rangers were left stunned. "Our teleports still work, right?" Lani asked.

"Yeah, looks like it," Danny answered when he checked his cuffs.

Two figures were coming toward them, seemingly bickering the entire way. Moriko and Rei were dressed casually. "I leave for a few weeks and some one lets Sora get turned evil. Again," she complained and put her hands on her hips.

"If that was a dig, I don't appreciate it," Moriko snapped back. She looked around at all the sleeping humans. "Dormite spell?" she gasped. "How long?" she demanded, zeroing in on Lammy.

"These, less than an hour but other humans have been asleep for days," she answered.

"You have a reversal potion in the works?" she asked.

Lammy bristled slightly. "I'm not an idiot and have been practicing magick for longer than you've been breathing on your own," she said.

"Stop. All of you," Taran said, putting his foot down, stepping into the trio. "Now is not the place. Rei, grab your sister. We need to regroup," he suggested.

"Right," Lani agreed.

Rei grabbed Moriko and the group teleported.

-x-

**Palace on the Moon**

Widow had watched the battle while Zita was nowhere to be seen and Roki was continuing with his project. "It's a perfect time to end the Rangers," she murmured to herself. They were fractured and it appeared half of them could no longer even Morph.

"I agree," Zita said from behind her. "Come with me," she prompted.

Widow turned, intrigued. Zita led her to Finster's lab. He was busily working with some clay. "What is it I'm supposed to be seeing?" she asked.

"I've been gathering clay fragments from the Harphuries," Zita answered. "Though they're no longer powered by the Reaver Orbs, they should still be infused with some power," she explained. "I could only find enough for two though."

Widow smirked slightly. "Two should be enough," she said. "Have you heard anything of Moriko?" she asked.

Zita shook her head. "I suppose she's doing whatever she thinks is best in regards to the Sword of Darkness," she answered. She shrugged. "I'll be in my room until Finster finishes," she said and walked away.

Widow mentally shrugged and went to find Roki.

-x-

Kat was checking over Melody and Zara when the Rangers returned with Moriko and Rei. "There's no change," she said to Billy.

"Lammy did warn us that defeating the monster wouldn't automatically wake up the people affected by the Dormite spell. We'll just wait until the reversal potion is ready," he said.

Kat nodded and they joined the Rangers in the Power Chamber. They were almost all talking at once. Rex sighed and nudged Taran. Taran put two fingers in his mouth and whistled loudly. Lammy and Griff, once again let in by his sister, clapped their hands over their ears.

"A little warning next time?" Griff asked.

"If I warned you, it wouldn't be as effective," Taran said. He glanced at Rex, who obviously had something to say.

"Long and short of it; the Sword of Darkness. How bad are things?" Rex asked the Repulsa sisters.

Moriko sighed. "Bad. Last time it was used, our mother was in control of it. She was a lot older and wiser and more powerful than Zita, Roki and Widow combined. They reforged it and set it loose. It's in control of itself using your friends. I'm not even sure the Power Sword can defeat it this time. It's not only drawing on the power of one Ranger, but eight. White spells aren't going to work at all," she said making Rei pout. Rei was exceedingly good at White spells.

"Is there any good news?" Lani asked.

"Not much," Moriko said honestly. "Rei, Lammy and I will do what research we can magical wise. We'll let you know if anything comes up," she said.

"How much anyone know about the Phantom Ranger?" Rex asked suddenly.

Cassie, who'd been listening in the background, started. "Why do you ask?" she asked.

Rex shrugged. "You know something?" he asked.

Cassie fidgeted. "He's something of a hobby," she muttered. "I know he's powerful. He shows up all over the galaxy at different times during different crises," she answered.

Billy nodded. "He's of Eltarin origin and he dates back centuries. Tales of the Phantom Ranger are abundant on many worlds," he explained. "I still don't see what that has to do with--"

"Me either," Rex said. "Forget I mentioned it," he said. He shook his head and paced away a few steps.

Danny gave a frustrated sigh. He scraped both hands through his hair. Tori put a comforting hand on his back.

"Look, guys, there's no point in staying around here worrying," Lammy said. "There's still a few days before the reversal potion is ready. Unless any one of you understand or can figure out what Billie did to your Power Coins better than Danny or Holly, I suggest you all just go home for now," she said.

"I hate to agree with doing nothing as the best course of action," Lani sighed, "I agree," she added.

Tori smiled. "Ok, how about this. You two come for a sleepover at my house. We'll take out minds off all this by acting silly and watching movies until we can't stand it anymore," she said to Lani and Manny. They agreed and the three girls left.

Lammy turned toward the Repulsa's and her brothers. "We'll go to my place so we can spread out," she said. They agreed and left the Command Center as well.

"What about you, seifu?" Fox asked Rex as Danny and Holly strolled off to one of he labs to try and figure out what had been done to them.

Rex shook his. "No freakin' clue. Dojo maybe," he said. "Yeah, that sounds about right," he said and teleported.

Fox sighed and went to see what he could do to help Danny and Holly if anything. He was feeling rather useless.

-X-

A couple of days went by without much incident. Rex, Fox and Danny had let off some steam by training.

Being no closer to a solution was frustrating. Especially when Mina and her Dark Rangers weren't exactly hiding. They were in school, would show up in places as if nothing had changed.

He'd sent them ahead and he stayed awhile longer. Finally, too tired to train anymore, he left. He showered, changed and walked out of the Dojo. "Rex! Fox said you'd be here," Cassie ran up to him. He waited for her to catch up. "Okay, being completely honest, it's been bugging me. Why did you ask about the Phantom Ranger?" she asked him.

Rex ducked down the alley. "Because I saw him here about a week ago," he answered.

"The same one? The powersuit changes with each new chosen Phantom Ranger," she said.

Rex nodded. "Looked like it. Why are *you* so interested?" he asked.

Cassie grimaced. "Ok, so I had a little crush on him. Sue me, I was a teenager," she said. "For all I know, though, he isn't even remotely human," she added. "Strange that he's been sighted but not active," she said.

Rex shook his head. "He's active, just not active here on Earth. I think he is human and lives on Earth. In fact, I think he lives right here," he added and looked up at the back of the Dojo.

Cassie frowned trying to piece together what he was saying. She gasped but didn't get a chance to say anything. Suddenly they were in a brand new location. They appeared to be inside a spaceship. It was gleaming, stainless steel and black everywhere.

"Way to be discreet," someone grumbled. Rex was not surprised to see Jason Lee Scott manning a console. Cassie, however, gasped again. "Yes, I know, we have some things to talk about. I'm not good at that. Sorry," he muttered.

"We can sort out your love life later, is there a reason I'm here?" Rex asked.

"I don't do too many things without a good reason, especially when it comes to the identity of the Phantom Ranger. There are only four people at present who know who I am. Tommy and Beez are the only ones I can even name. You two make six," he said.

"Well, we're waiting," Cassie said, crossing her arms over her chest.

Rex bit back a smile.

Jason sat down in what appeared to be a pilots seat. He sorted out his thoughts for a moment. "Being the Gold Ranger nearly killed me. Trey didn't know how to help me so he arranged for me to get to Eltar. Once there, the sorcerer-scientists' helped me heal. While I was there, I became the Phantom Ranger. Along with the responsibility I was also given a legacy. That legacy included what could be called a prophecy. Well, several, but this one applies now.

"I was told that an Eclipse would settle upon Gaia. Darkness would spread when a Sword touches the mind of a Dark Queen. The Dark Queen will cut off her former allies from their Power. Only the New



Hope can begin the end of the Eclipse. Only Hope and Love can shatter the Darkness.

"I know. It sounds like crap, but I give it credence. And I know you are the New Hope" he said when Rex looked at him blankly.

"Why is that exactly?"

Jason grinned. "Well several reasons. When Billy and Beez were doing blood tests to study the genetic abilities they not only discovered Sora was part Triforian. They also discovered you had an Eltarin ancestor. It goes back several generations. I asked them not to say anything because I knew this day was coming. Want to know how I knew this day was coming?" he asked.

Rex sighed through his nose "Yes, that would be very nice," he said in clipped tones.

Jason grinned again. "That's the best part. In Eltarin the words 'New Hope' are Xa'Vier Har't," he said, essentially pronouncing Rex's full name with strange inflections.

"You're kidding me," Rex said.

Jason shook his head. "And there was plan put into place for when this prophecy was upon Gaia, that being Earth. People a whole lot smarter than me theorized that it would somehow mean that Power Rangers would be cut off from the Grid and would need an alternate means of facing this Dark Queen," he said. He twisted his right wrist and a large bracelet form where the Power Ruby gleamed. He popped the Ruby out of it's setting and tossed it to Rex.

Rex hastily caught it. The Ruby began glowing. There was a bright flash as the Ruby formed a brace on his arm identical to Jason's. The Ruby emitted another flash of light and five smaller gems appeared in front of him before disappearing again. "The crap is this supposed to mean? Am I the Phantom Ranger now?" he asked.

"Yes and no. It's a one time deal. I'm temporarily transferring my powers to you. I'll get them back intact until I retire. Then they'll be transferred to their new host and conform to him," he explained.

Rex narrowed his eyes. "And those other gems?"

An alert sounded. "That's up to you. We have to get to the Command Center. Now," Jason said.

Rex nodded and the three of them teleported. He noticed the bracelet had disappeared. "What's going on?" he asked he arrived.

"Two monsters and an army of Putties have arrived in Angel Grove," Beez answered. "Wait, something else is happening," she said. She gasped. "Unknown robots are appearing to battle the Putties," she said.

Sure enough black robots began to appear. Some had silver cogs visible, some had copper and some had gold. They were fairly efficient. "No sign of the Dark Rangers," she said.

"What are we going to do?" Manny asked, biting her lip.

Rex frowned. "Someone needs to engage the monsters. Ordinarily this is where we'd split the team..." he trailed off. "We have two teams," he said.

"We do?" Fox asked. "By my calculations, you don't have any teams," he said. "You all right, seifu? Didn't kick you in the head too bad did I?" he asked.

"You didn't kick me in the head at all. Billy, the Zeo Zords were destroyed but not the crystal, right?" he asked.

Billy nodded. "It's true, the Zeo Morphers still exist but Rex, they aren't nearly as powerful as they used to be," he said warningly.

"They don't have to be. Get the band back together. Cassie--"

"Astro Morphers," she said, nodding. "But who gets what?" she asked.

"Jason can decide," Rex answered. "Beez," he prompted.

Two silver cases appeared. Tommy opened one and Jason opened the other.

Tommy distributed the Blue Zeonizer to Rocky, the Pink Zeonizer to Kat, the Green Zeonizer to Adam and the Yellow Zeonizer to Aisha. "It's Morphin' Time!" he called and joined his two parts of the Zeonizer together. The others did the same.

"Zeo Ranger One, pink!"

"Zeo Ranger Two, yellow!"

"Zeo Ranger Three, blue!"

"Zeo Ranger Four, green!"

"Zeo Ranger Five, red!"

Respectively-colored energy formed shapes over their faces. They lowered their arms and waves of matching energy formed digital matrixes over their bodies. Green energy traveled back up forming their powersuits and helmets.

Jason distributed the Blue Astro Morpher to TJ, the Pink Astro Morpher to Cassie, the Black Astro Morpher to Billy, the Yellow Astro Morpher to Kim and kept the Red Astro Morpher for himself. He gave the Violet Digimorpher to Trini. Zhane apparently still had his original Digimorpher.

"Let's Rocket!" Cassie called as she and the others opened the lids of their Morphers. They pressed a series of numbers. They shimmered respectively colored gleams as their powersuits formed. Symbols on their helmets glowed briefly.

The two teams teleported to face each monster.

Rex looked at the remaining people in the Power Chamber. "Now, for the rest of us," he said as his Phantomizer appear. "I think I got myself a plan."

-X-

Meanwing and Freakbeak were somewhat humanoid shaped owl-like monsters. Each of them was covered in feathers, their feet ended in talons and their winged arms ended in four two-foot-long claws. Meanwing was blue with orange eyes and markings while Freakbeak was orange with green eyes and markings.

Meanwing was shooting energy from his eyes at anything and everything. His main mission was to take out Mina and her Rangers. His secondary mission was to take out the now Morphless Rangers. Any destruction he could cause in the meanwhile was just a bonus.

The appearance of the robots to face the Putties was not his problem. "Oh, Power Rangers! Come out, come out wherever you are," he called. His voice warbled and squawked as he talked.

Six blasts hit him, making him stumble back. "What!" he squawked. No one was supposed to shoot laser blasts at him. He looked around to see that he was surrounded by Power Rangers. "Who are you? You aren't who I was looking for!"

Astro Red holstered his Astro Blaster. "We're what you're getting," he said. "Spiral Saber!" he summoned a drill-like sword that appeared in a beam of bright red light. He ran forward and engaged the monster and was thrown aside. He recovered enough to roll to his feet.

"Astro Axe!"

"Lunar Lance!"

Astro Blue and Astro Black summoned their weapons. They went in close to the monster and traded blows, but the dangerously long claws scraped each of them, sending them flying back.

"Satelite Stunner!"

"Star Slinger!"

Astro Pink and Yellow's weapons appeared. Pink shot him with pink rings of ennergy and Yellow shot him with yellow energy pellets.

"Nebula Neutralizer!" Astro Violet summoned a weapon that appeared on her arm. She held up her arm and fired an energy blast that opened like a net and wrapped around the monster.

Meanwing squawked and warbled as he ran around briefly. His eventually freed himself and turned toward the Astro Rangers and fired a devastating volley of eye beams at them, making the area around

them explode.

-x-

Freakbeak walked around squawking and chirping in a very unnerving manner, "'He's not a man, he's a Chicken Boo!'" when he'd get to the word 'boo' he would stop and began shooting energy blasts from his eyes and caw triumphantly. He'd strut around and start again.

He was cut of mid-lyric by several blasts of multi-colored energy. "What? Whaaa-aat?!" he squawked. He puffed his feathers and looked around. "Whoo-hoo-hoo are you?" he demanded when he didn't see the Power Rangers he expected.

Zeo Red cocked his head. "And they said I wouldn't need to suit up again," he said. "Zeo Rangers out of retirement for one show only. Let's make it a good one," he suggested.

"Right!" his team agreed.

"Zeo Power Disc!" Pink summoned. A small round shield appeared.

"Zeo Power Double Clubs!" Yellow summoned. Dual stick-like weapons appeared. They ran in close and while smashed him in the beak, Yellow beat at his torso with her Clubs. Freakbeak roared a and used his long claws to knock them away.

"Zeo Power Axes!" Blue summoned. Small twin blades appeared in his hands.

"Zeo Power Hatchets!" Green summoned. Larger twin blades appeared in his hands.

Together they rushed forward. Freakbeak used his claws as a shield and kicked them away, but they managed to break one.

"Zeo Power Sword!" Red summoned the blade. He ran and jumped, coming down, ready to slash the monster in half if possible. Freakbeak managed to knock him aside but not before he lost an entire hand.

Hurt and furious, Freakbeak rain fiery hail down upon them from his eyes. The world around them erupted.

-x-

The Dark Rangers arrived not long after the two the two older teams did. "What on Earth is going on?" Saber wandered. From their vantage point on a rooftop, they could see both battles.

"That's smart. Using the elders to take on the monsters," Tyrant murmured.

"But surely they know that neither team can actually defeat the monsters," Master said.

"That isn't the point. They're up to something. But what?" Triumph said. She was missing a piece of the puzzle. Something to give her the key to put their plan together. She thought she'd planned for every

eventual happenstance. "I'm missing something," she said loudly in frustration. "My Darktrons are handling the Putties. We're more than enough to handle the monsters yet they called in the reserves. Why? What am I missing?" she growled.

"It's called the Phantom Phenomenon."

The Dark Rangers turned to see their former team mates standing behind them. Rex stood just a little in front of the others. Lani, Danny, Manny, Tori and, shockingly, Fox flanked him in either side. In full battle armor, Taran, Lammy, Grifforzer, Rei and Moriko made up the rear.

"What's called what?" Terror asked, mildly confused as usual.

"No. You can't have!" Saber said. Ever the Ranger buff, he was putting it together even faster than Triumph.

"Can't have what?" she demanded.

"Time to Phantom Up!" Rex said and he twisted his wrist making the Phantomizer appear. The Power Ruby Glowed and he began phasing in and out as black and chrome began wrapping around him.

On Lani's wrist a Phantomizer appeared with a pink Power Ruby. It began to glow and she phased in and out as a slimmer, pink version of the Phantom suit began to appear.

On Danny's wrist a Phantomizer appeared with a blue Power Sapphire. It began to glow and he phased in and out as a slimmer, blue version of the Phantom suit began to appear.

On Manny's wrist a Phantomizer appeared with a yellow Power Topaz. It began to glow and she phased in and out as a slimmer, yellow version of the Phantom suit began to appear.

On Fox's wrist a Phantomizer appeared with a green Power Emerald. It began to glow and he phased in and out as a slimmer, green version of the Phantom suit began to appear.

On Tori's wrist a Phantomizer appeared with a white Power Diamond. It began to glow and she phased in and out as a slimmer, white version of the Phantom suit began to appear.

The Dark Rangers found themselves facing a full team of Phantom Rangers while battles raged below them. Another battle was about to begin. The battle that will determine the fates of Earth's Power Rangers once and for all.

**-xEnd Chapter 16 x To Be Continuedx-**

## 17 - End of the Eclipse

### Palace on the Moon

Widow was watching things through one of her portals. Her mouth thinned as her monsters were engaged by Rangers they no longer considered threats. The Zeo Rangers were thought completely defunct and the Astro Rangers now exclusively operated out of KO-35. At least that's what all their intel said.

"How is this happening?" she demanded of no one.

"I wouldn't worry about them. Neither team will last too long against Meanwing and Freakbeak," Zita said thoughtfully.

"No, of course not, but it indicates something bigger is in the works, but what?" Widow murmured. Zita couldn't find an explanation. They didn't have to wait long before everything to become obvious. The Phantom Ranger reappearing and multiplying was hard to miss. Both women turned white and watched anxiously to see what would happen next.

-x-

Dark Triumph and the other Dark Rangers eyed the Phantom Rangers their friends had just turned into. "As I said, the confrontation was up to you," she said tightly. The Sword of Darkness appeared in her hand. "Neutralize them," she ordered the others.

"You know the plan," Phantom said to the others as the Dark Rangers went on the offensive.

Dark Tyrant drew his TyrannoSword. He rushed at Phantom, who made twin sticks appear in his hands and blocked the slash by crossing them in front of him. He grunted at the effort. He'd obviously put his strength behind it. He kicked out and back-flipped to the edge of the roof. "You want me, come and get me," he said and jumped. He landed on a nearby roof.

Dark Tyrant scoffed. He ran and jumped. He landed in a crouch, the concrete beneath him cracking a little. "Why are you running, Rex? Not scared are you?" he asked, as he raised himself to full, impressive height.

Phantom shook his head. "Just making sure we have the room to do this right," he said. He and Tyrant circled each other, weapons at the ready, looking for the perfect opportunity. Tyrant muttered under his breath and sprang forward. Phantom gladly met him.

Dark Sword split himself into three. One of him summoned his familiar CeratoSword, but the other two weren't empty handed for long. Each of them summoned smaller, simpler swords.

In his full gleaming gold, scorpion armor, Griff smiled. "I usually like to pound on the Green Weinie over

there, but you'll do this time," he said and made his mace appear.

"Aren't you on the wrong side of this?" the Dark Sword holding the CeratoSword asked.

"Nope," Griff answered and attacked. Sword put up his weapon and blocked but it was jarring. Often even though his usual strength is lessened when he split up, it was balanced by the 'strength in numbers' theorem. He wasn't usually facing two alien beings with the strength of ten men either.

Lammy also wore her full scorpion armor. She wielded a sword of her own and was fencing with a Dark Sword using one of the smaller swords. She was strong but he was good.

Moriko was facing the final Dark Sword. Her armor was similar to Zita's usual battle armor except without the blades and she favored smoky green, gray and purple colors. She also had a brand new staff gifted to her by her mother. It was made of a rare wood found only in the Mystic Realm. She knew how to use it well. She'd been training with Griff. She also had a longer reach than Dark Sword and his little sword. He was, however, the more experienced combatant. She couldn't seem to get the upper-hand on him.

Lammy and Griff had suited Taran up in a gold armor similar to theirs but with a spider motif. His leather under armor was also dark brown rather than black. He wielded a mace. It wasn't his StegoMace but it would do. Especially against Dark Drake.

Drake had access to his Stygian Blade and happily summoned it. "You never actually beat me," he said, whirling his Blade in his hand idly.

"I wouldn't be so cocky. You were juiced to gills with whatever Widow was giving you. You ain't juiced anymore," Taran said. Drake snarled and attacked. Taran brought his mace up to block. They strained against each other, nearly nose to nose. Taran reared back his head and smashed it into Drake's helmet. His head piece protected him but Drake was jarred and stumbled back. He shook his head, trying to clear it. He went on the attacked, more viciously. it was almost all Taran could do to defend himself.

Phantom White sprang into action against Dark Styx. "I kind of hate to say it, but you look good in purple," she remarked as she swung her twin sticks at the older girl.

Styx blocked with her Power Staff. "Thanks," she grunted and whirled around, spinning her staff and then coming in low in an attempt to sweep White's feet out from under her. White jumped, doing a no handed back flip. She landed deftly. She crouched as Styx came toward her. The Power Diamond in her chest-plate glowed. She put her hand on the ground and patch of ice spread out around it. She rolled backwards. Styx hit the ice and her feet came out from under her.

Phantom Green had been shocked when Rex had put a hand on his head and made the Phantomizer appear on his wrist. Now he was in the middle of a battle with experienced Power Rangers who've gone bad. It was all bloody mad. Still, he'd been given a task and he was going to see it through. The twin sticks that seemed to make up the Phantom arsenal appeared in his hands. Luckily for him, they were the beginning weapons Rex had him training with.

Unlucky for him, Dark Saber had been in training a lot longer. Saber summoned his Power Daggers and

jumped over Green head and whirled around to slash him from behind. Green managed to whirl around just in time. Saber jumped again, but not over him. Green managed to get his sticks up to block the flying kick to his chest but the momentum sent him flying off the roof.

He landed with a crash. The sidewalk under him cracked and he left somewhat of a crater. Shocked to still be alive, Green got to his feet just as Saber landed on cat feet nearby. "That fall looked like it hurt. Did it?" he asked.

Green twisted his neck this way and that. "Surprisingly no," he answered.

"Too bad!" Saber said and came at him again. He jumped. Green ducked. When his hand touched the ground, the Power Emerald in his chest glowed. A pillar of earth rushed up to meet Saber, slamming into his middle.

Dark Master summoned her Power Axe. She watched Phantom Yellow come at her with her sticks in hand. Yellow may not be on her level in karate but she touch, fast and acrobatic. It was not going to be an easy win. She didn't move very well while she was solid. The two circled each other as they sized each other up.

Yellow began to run, she'd zoom in close, get in a few swings with her sticks and dash away. It was all Master could do to block the blows, she was that fast. Yellow began to move again. Master, so far dodging, turned solid and stepped into her path.

Yellow hit solid matter at a high rate of speed and bounced back, crashing into the ground a skidding. She almost feel off the roof. She managed to get a hold on the edge by dropping her sticks. She hefted herself back onto the roof. Master was coming at her axe raised.

Yellow's power Topaz began to glow. She grabbed the Axe handle. A streak of lightning flashed. It hit the Axe and sent Dark Master flying from the shock.

Phantom Blue faced one of his best friends, now under the influence of an evil Sword. He also seemed to be having some sort of relationship with his other best friend, also evil. It was all just too weird. "We're gonna fix this, Nath," he said as his sticks appeared. His plan was to get in close before Nathan could get enough distance to use his Power Bow.

He didn't realize that Mina had already taken that into account and gave Dark Terror an alternate weapon. "I don't need fixing, Danny," he said. What appeared to be curved bladed tonfa appeared in his hands. He rushed forward. The two of them traded blows, lashing out with their weapons, arms, legs.

Blue was shocked at the level of skill displayed by his friend. He jumped back. "Somebody's been practicin'," he muttered.

"Yes," Terror answered. He suddenly threw his weapons at Blue discus style. He levitated and summoned the Power Bow.

"Crap," Blue said. He'd managed to deflect the weapons, but now he was running, zigzagging, and taking cover as arrows zoomed at him. He also tried to avoid getting in anyone else's way. He needed a



way to knock him out of the sky. His Power Sapphire began to glow. He suddenly stopped and turned. This building was the kind that had its own water reservoir. The door suddenly burst open and a thousand pounds of water crashed into Dark Terror, guided by Phantom Blue's hands.

Dark Triumph waited patiently while Phantom Pink approached her. "You're cut off from the Power Sword. What do you hope to accomplish?" she asked.

Pink shrugged. "Hopefully, getting my friends and my boyfriend back to normal," she answered and her twin sticks appeared.

Triumph scoffed. "How do you plan on doing that? With some sticks? The Sword is more powerful than you can even imagine. So am I. Admittedly, I didn't calculate this turn of events, but when it's all over, it'll merely serve to convince everyone once and for all that joining us is the only choice. Things on this planet will be so much better for everyone with us in charge," she said. "You will all understand in time," she said and attacked.

Pink was taken aback by her sudden and well executed attack. She brought her sticks up to defend. "I see you've taken advantage of Tai and Sora," she remarked.

"Naturally," Triumph agreed. She came at Pink again. Pink barely had enough time to deflect, but while Triumph was better than she expected, the girl had been a barely proficient in karate klutz. Pink had been training since she could walk. She thought she'd get the upper hand, but the Sword of Darkness itself didn't want to be defeated. It gave Triumph boosted speed, agility and strength.

Sometimes, more than her sticks, Pink's insane elasticity saved her hide. Sometimes it didn't. Triumph managed to slip under her guard and slash her across the chest several times. She fell back with a cry. Her Power Ruby began to glow and thrusts her hands out at Triumph. A localized vortex of wind energy scooped her up and whirled her away. It dropped her as it dissipated.

-x-

The ferocious orange bird monster, Freakbeak literally crowed as his energy attack exploded around him. He was sure he had the Astro Rangers beaten. He wasn't far from the truth. They lay around him, smoking.

Astro Red clambered to his feet. Around him, the other Rangers got to their feet as well. "That was pretty good, but it's going to take more than that," he said.

Freakbeak spluttered. "That's not possible. You're all out of date. Weak," he squawked.

"We'll see about that," Red said. He pulled his Astro Blaster and combined it with his Spiral Saber. "Spiral Saber Booster Mode!"

"Quadro Blaster!" Astro Pink ordered. They combined the Lunar lance, the Astro Axe, Star Slinger and Satellite Stunner into one weapon wielded by Astro Black.

"Super Nebulizer!" Astro Violet changed her weapon's configuration.

They pointed each weapon at the monster and fired. They fired. Beams of red, white and violet energy crashed into him, exploding.

"I forgot how much fun that could be," Astro Black remarked.

Freakbeak squawked and flapped his wing. He was smoking, sparking, and hurt but he was not down. "That all you got? Let me show you my Bird Fu!" he screamed and ran forward. He began spinning, bouncing around like a top, hitting each Ranger several times before they could react. They went flying in a shower of small explosions. They landed hard, losing their Morphs.

Jason gritted his teeth as he got to his feet.

Freakbeak squawked in surprise as the others pushed themselves up as well. "Surrendering on your feet? I can respect that," he said smugly.

"Never," Jason said.

"Eh? Eh? What's that you say?" he demanded.

"Never!" Kim shouted.

"Never give up!" Cassie said.

"Never surrender!" TJ agreed.

"Let's Rocket!" Billy called.

-x-

Meanwing nervously scratched at the ground with a talon as he waited for the results of his attack. He expected victory. These Rangers were weak, after all. Old. Retired.

Obsolete.

Zeo Red coughed as he stood. He dusted bits of debris off his shoulders. He helped Pink to her feet. Blue, Green and Yellow got to their feet as well.

Meanwing clucked loudly. "How'd you do that?" he asked and jerked his head around, as if looking for the secret to some trick.

"The Zeo Crystals are old, powered down. They're still more than a match for you," Red said. "Zeo Blaster!" The Zeo Rangers came together and joined their weapons to form a weapon wielded by Red. They fired on the monster.

Meanwing staggered back, sparked and smoked. As he fizzled he squawked and his feathers fluffed out. "Not bad, but not good enough. Behind my Fly Swan Do!" he said, running forward and flapping his

wings. He took to the air and began to fly around them, hitting them multiple times with his claws. When he landed, they exploded and went flying.

Their Morphs failed as they lay there. Meanwing, scratched at the ground again. His chest feathers fluffed out again as he strutted cockily.

"You think you're cock of the walk?" Tommy asked as he sat up.

"You got another thing coming," Rocky piped up and got to his feet with a wince. His old back injury twinged slightly.

Meanwing turned toward them slowly. "How?" he demanded.

"That's the best part," Aisha said as she and Kat to their feet.

"It's something Zordon once told us," Kat said.

"It's human factor," Adam declared.

Meanwing clucked nervously. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"We'll show you," Tommy said. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-x-

Rei had been hiding in the shadows while the Dark Rangers were being distracted. Rex had specifically taken her aside to ask her a question about White spells and love. She had to admit, his plan was kind of ingenious. It was also their only chance. They didn't have time to teach the spell she needed to use to Taran. Really everything was up to her.

That was scary. She was more afraid of messing this up now than she had been the entire time she was in the Mystic Realm helping her mother prepare for what she called the trials before the coming of the Light. Yeah, her mother was cryptic like that.

She watched Phantom Blue all but drown Dark Terror. He landed in a soggy heap. She dashed forward. She caught him just as he was sitting up. She in front of him and held her hands on the either side of his head and began to chant. Her White magic wasn't strong enough to break the spell that the Sword of Darkness wove over him. She knew that.

That wasn't their endgame. She was using her White magic to amplify his natural feelings of love to overwhelm the Dark spell long enough to make a difference. She agreed with Rex. Nathan's love for Billie was their last best hope to bring an end to this once and for all.

Dark Terror was frozen, his head felt like it was going to explode.

Dark Triumph got to her feet, she gripped her Sword and was about to have at Phantom Pink again when she saw Rei standing over Dark Terror. "Get away from him!" she shouted.

Rei glanced toward her voice. Triumph threw her Sword. Terror knocked Rei back out of the way. The Sword caught him, going through his shoulder. He gasped in pain unable to do anything else.

"No!" Triumph shouted and ran to him. "Oh, my God. Nathan. I'm so sorry," she whispered. Tears filled her eyes behind her helmet.

"Hurts. Get it out," Terror said through clenched teeth. He cried out when her attempt to remove it failed.

Triumph was suddenly torn. It was either him or the Sword. His Morph fizzled and failed. He clutched at his shoulder. Pain etched his face. "Billie," he whispered.

Triumph gripped the Sword. "I'm sorry. This is going to hurt," she said softly. She briefly touched his face. He gritted his teeth and nodded. She gripped the Sword again and yanked up. Nathan screamed as loud as the blade when it warped and bent. It shattered releasing a shockwave of energy that blew everyone off the roof except the two of them.

The power source of the Dark Morphs now destroyed, their Morphs fizzled and failed for good.

On a completely different roof Phantom and Dark Tyrant traded blows. Tyrant suddenly faltered and staggered, his Morph failing. Phantom was already mid-swing. His armored fist connected with his friends unprotected face. "Son of a-- Tai!" he said as the ungainly frame staggered. He caught him.

"Ow," Tai grumbled and rubbed his jaw.

"Oh, shut up. You deserved that," Phantom said.

"I guess I did," Tai agreed starkly. Phantom hugged him. Tai hugged back.

Phantom stepped back and his Morph disappeared. Five bright lights were suddenly absorbed into his Power Ruby. His Phantomizer itself disappeared. "Huh, destiny accomplished," he declared.

"Yeah...about that. We need to have a talk about that," Tai said.

Rex nodded. "Regroup on the roof," he said into his communicator. He and Tai took the easy route and teleported to where Billie was sobbing quietly and using one of her handheld healing devices on Nathan's shoulder.

Wood was gripping his sore stomach when he arrived with Fox. "Remind me never to underestimate you again," he complained. Fox just grinned.

Tori gave an inarticulate squeak as she reappeared. She hugged Wood, who painfully hugged her back. Danny and Chloe reappeared and hugged it out.

Soon, everyone had reappeared on the roof and much hugging was done. Except for Fox. "I ain't huggin' those jerk-wads. The rest of them didn't turn into snarling, bratty dill weeds to everyone," he said, looking at Autumn and Win. They were shamefaced and couldn't deny it.

"Sorry about that," Billie said with a sniff. "The Sword of Darkness was screwing with Autumn's aura reading abilities. She was constantly irritable because of it. It was also warped slightly by the changes Widow made to Winter's body, elevating his aggression. Fixing them was on my to-do list," she murmured. She avoided looking Nathan in the face as she assured that his shoulder wound was beginning to knit together.

She pulled a device out of her pocket and pressed a button. "The Morph blocker has been deactivated," she said as she got to her feet.

Danny came to help Nathan stand.

"Just in time. Although someone had the genius idea of throwing the elders into the line of fire, we should probably go relieve them and take out the monsters once and for all," Tai said. "We'll deal with all *this* afterwards," he added grimly.

"Then this is where we'll take our leave," Moriko said. "Be wary Rangers. Next time we meet we may not be on the side of things." She gave them a dainty wave.

Griff gave them a two-fingered salute. The two of them disappeared in puffs of smoke.

"Shoulder going to make it?" Rex asked Nathan.

"It'll have to," Nathan said and gave it an experimental twist. He winced but he could handle it.

"I'll just go watch on the big screen," Fox said and teleported. When he moved into the Command Center, he'd been given a communicator/teleporter the same as the older Rangers.

Tai twisted his wrists making his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-X-

Meanwing found getting rid of the Astro Rangers was a lot harder than he realized. They couldn't hope to defeat him, yet they bounced back from everything they threw at him.

Freakbeak was finding that to be true of the Zeo Rangers.

The two teams of Rangers had managed to bring the two monsters to the same spot in the city. They looked at each other then looked at the Rangers. They ran into each other's arms and embraced. They rippled as they became one larger, bright red and yellow bird monster.

"Oh, that can't be good," Zeo Red commented.

"It never is when they do stuff like that," Astro Red agreed.

"Meanbeak Wingjitsu!" the bird monster crowed and began zigzagging, leaving blurred after-images of itself, making his way through the Rangers, slashing and shooting them with eye beams. They went

flying in all directions, once again losing their Morphs. This time, they weren't sure they had it in them to get up again.

They didn't have to.

Multi-colored beams of light hit the monster, making him stagger and spark. "Whaaat? Whaat?" he squawked, flipping his wings and puffing out his rustled feathers. He found himself surrounded by a united front of Power Rangers.

"Thanks for all the help but we got it from here," the male T-Rex Ranger said to the elders.

"We'll leave you too it," Tommy said, getting to his feet.

"Send him our love," Jason added. He and the rest of the elders teleported back to the Command Center.

"Go," male Red said.

Silver sprang forward. He split into three. One of him summoned his CeratoSword and the other two retained access to the two smaller swords. As they ran by they slashed into sides. The him with the CeratoSword jumped and slashed him down the middle.

Weapons out already, Gold and Electrum rushed ahead. She elegantly slashed him several times with the VelociRapier. He simply smashed the monster in the face with the StegoMace.

Female Green used her Power Staff as a pole vault and smashed her entire body into the monster, feet first. Stygian Armor already summoned, male Green used his Blade to jab. The Yellow team went in close and used their weapons before moving away. Female Pink whirled in close.

"You're Bird Fu is strong," Meanbeak squawked painfully. He didn't get a chance to say more as a succession of pink energy arrows hit him in the chest. Female Blue ran at him and jumped, stabbing her Power Sai into the sides of neck. She jumped away as male Blue slashed him several times with his Power Lance.

The Black Team moved in next. Female black cut one of wings off with her Power Axe. Male Black used his Scythe blade to do the same to the other.

Both powered up Reds rushed forward. they used the Power Sword and the Tyranno Sword to slash him all over, leaving red streaks in their wake.

Meanbeak spark and exploded but he wasn't out. Yet.

"Magnum Blast!" male Black had summoned the cannon while the Reds were slashing at the monster. The cannon fire barreled through the bird monster. He really did explode that time. He came together again, growing to enormous proportions.

He crowed triumphantly and began demonstrating his magnificence in bird related martial arts on the

buildings around him.

"The Zords aren't powered up enough to win but if we double team him with the Magna Alpha Megazord and the Alphamax Cannon we should do it," male Black stated.

"Magna Alpha Megazord," female Red summoned.

"I definitely need that upgrade," male Red declared. "All right Holly, Alphamax Cannon!" he said.

From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. It teleported female Red, male Black, female Pink, male Blue, female Yellow, male Green, Gold, Silver and Electrum in the shared cockpit.

The Alphamax Cannon appeared beside the Magna Alpha Megazord. Male red, female Black, male Pink, female Blue, male Yellow and female Green were teleported aboard.

Meanbeak squawked. "Not this time, Rangers. I'm a thousands times more powerful!" he said and launched an array of eye beams at them.

The Megazord was rocked. "We can't take much of that," male Blue said.

"I'm on it," female Red said. "Magnum Dino Blast!" She lined the target up on her screen. She pressed the buttons, the dino mouths come open and their tail whipped up and four points of energy where fired at the monster.

Male Red approached the center console in the cannon. He grabbed the dual joysticks and targeted the monster. "Target Acquired. Firing!" He depressed the buttons. Two by two, from the outside in the points of the Alphamax Cannon began firing, hitting the monster in succession. Each hit glowed. Finally the middle barrel fired. A beam of blindingly bright light hit. The other ten points connected in a circle.

Both blasts combined into one awesomely devastating blast that practically vaporized the monster. They heard one pathetically loud squawk as the monster turned to dust. There would be no clay fragments from that encounter.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Widow sat in Roki's throne, holding her head. She was not a defeatist but she had to admit, she was a little afraid at the moment. She'd thrown everything she possibly could at the Rangers. Her latest scheme had backfired in a hideous way. "This is all your fault," she hissed at Zita.

"Don't blame me. I merely made a suggestion. You were the one who couldn't wait to reforge the Sword

of Darkness," Zita shot back.

"It's all your faults. Move on," Moriko said as she joined them. Griff followed her silently.

"You have some nerve coming back here," Widow snarled.

Moriko raised a brow, unfazed. "I was doing what I could to correct the situation *all three of you* created," she said.

Widow made a noise somewhere between a scoff and a growl. She couldn't really argue with that. "I suppose the question is what now?" she said.

"That, my dear, is what I have been researching the past while," Roki said as he walked in calmly. "Pack your bags, my love, we're going on a trip," he said. He had a particularly gleefully wicked expression on his face. He didn't seem worried in the least that they'd suffered another crushing defeat.

"On a trip?" Zita asked.

"Color me intrigued, husband. Where are we going?" she asked.

"The Shadovian Cluster in the M51 Galaxy," he answered. His sisters gasped and Griff raised a brow.

"That's deep into Vilite territory. What could be so important that you'd risk that?" she asked.

"Roki, that's insanity. The Shadovian Cluster is where Grandfather keeps his most prized and dangerous assets. Are you proposing to steal from him?" she asked.

Roki shook his head. It was rather well known that as children born after their parents were caught in the the Z-Wave, Roki and Zita were not welcome in M51 despite their evil natures and deeds. "No. It had nothing to do with anything he claims as his. If it all goes according to plan, he'll never even know we were there," he said. His excitement hadn't dulled at all.

"You still haven't explained what you're after there," Moriko pointed out.

"I'm after enough power to defeat the Power Rangers and conquer Earth once and for all," he said. He held a hand out to Widow. "Will you follow me?" he asked.

Widow reached out and took his hand. "Of course," she agreed.

He pulled in close for a hug and dropped a kiss on her lips. "While we're gone, you'll continue to pester and annoy the Rangers?" he asked his sisters.

"Naturally," Zita agreed.

"It'd be kind of dull around here otherwise," Moriko agreed.

Roki nodded. "We have much to do before we leave," he said and pulled Widow along with him.



Zita and Moriko looked at each other for a long moment. Zita turned on her heel and went to her room. Moriko sighed. She draped herself around Griff. "It's been a long day. Let's go rest for awhile," she said.

Griff scooped her up in his arms. "If you insist," he said and carried her out of the throne room.

-x-

Holly had been busy recoding the security system in the Command Center to allow the formerly evil Rangers in. They had no trouble regrouping there after the fight. There was a momentary tense silence then a hail of cheers went up, celebrating the return to grace.

Billie pulled Lammy aside. "I deactivated the Darktrons and sent them back to the Dark Dimension but I need you to do something for me," she said quietly.

"What is it?" Lammy asked.

Billie sighed deeply. "There are things there that I was working on. World dominating things. If anyone ever found them and activated or finished them it'd be devastating. I need you to get everything. Destroy it," she said. "You're the only one here who can get into the Dark Dimension," she said.

Lammy nodded. "Consider it done," she promised. She gave her arm a squeeze. She disappeared in a puff of smoke.

"Where'd Lammy go?" Taran asked.

Billie just shook her head. She couldn't explain again. She couldn't face it. "I'm going home," she declared and teleported out before anyone could stop her.

"Should someone go after her?" Wood asked.

Nathan shook his head. "I'll talk to her, give her some space," he said. "I'm finding me a medi-bed," he said and wandered into the Medi-Lab.

"I am so glad our family is whole again," Beez declared.

"Yeah, us, too Beez," Danny said.

"We can regroup later. Everyone looks like they're about to keel over at any given moment. Young or old, go home," Tai said.

"This is my home," Fox declared with a sniff.

"No it's not. If you're still ticked at Win and Autumn, you can crash in my basement, Grasshopper," Rex declared.

"Whatever you say, seifu," Fox agreed with dignity. Rex rolled his eyes and teleported out with Fox. He'd

catch up with Jason later. At the moment he seemed to be having a serious whispered conversation with Cassie.

"It's gonna take some time to make it up to him," Autumn said glumly.

"And he's going to make us sweat it to the very end," Winter agreed woefully. "I've still got to find a way to apologize to AJ," he added with a wince.

"He's gone," Taran said.

"Gone?" Winter asked.

Taran nodded. "Left the day after your fight. Don't worry. I'm sure you'll get your chance. Why don't we go drink coffee and wait for Lammy to get back from her errand?" They agreed glumly and they teleported out.

Rei was in the Command Center, but while the Rangers were fighting Meanbeak, she'd been discarding the shards of the Sword of Darkness. With any luck she'd hidden the pieces so well, no one would ever be able to use it again. She watched Sora approach her frowning severely. "Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Griff told me how dangerous it is for you to see your mother. Why didn't you tell me?" he asked, slightly hurt.

Rei sighed. "I didn't want you to worry," she said.

"Now isn't the place, let's get back to my apartment and talk about this," he said. She nodded and the two of them left.

Tori pretty much hadn't stopped hugging Wood and Chloe. At the same time. She was attached to each of them. "Let's go get some fries and ice cream," she said. "Danny, you too," she said.

"A'ight," Danny agreed.

"Are you ever going to let me breath again?" Chloe asked.

"Nope," Tori answered.

"My stomach is still kind of sore," Wood complained.

"Sorry, but I'm not letting either of you go," she declared.

Danny chuckled. The four of them teleported.

Manny went to Holly. "Let's go. I think those two need a moment," she said and nodded to where Lani and Tai stood awkwardly apart. Holly nodded. They teleported out.

Lani blushed. Her friends were so obvious. Tai reached a hand out. "Why don't we go somewhere quiet to talk?" he said. Lani eschewed his hand and hugged him around the middle. Tai hugged her back and teleported.

-X-

By the next day Lammy's Dormite reversal potion was finished and Beez began distributing it to everyone affected by the spell. The first people they used it on were Zara and Melody. They were quite irritated to have slept through all the action. Zara was doubly irate because someone had used the Digimorpher intended for her. She was steamed.

Fox brought her a hamburger and some fries to cheer her up. She had to admit, earth food tended to do that. Especially meat. There weren't many animals on KO-35 that were substantial enough for people to actually eat. She gave him a grateful smile around a mouthful of burger.

Melody was just disappointed she missed all the Phantom action. Beez cheered her up by letting her watch the footage of the fight.

-X-

Rex strolled into Jason's office at the Dojo. Jason raised a brow. "Just making sure everything got back to its proper place," he answered the unspoken question.

"It did," Jason assured him. "I trusted you with a secret, Rex," he said finally.

Rex nodded. "And I'll keep it. Tai will probably figure it out," he said.

Jason nodded. "Probably already has," he declared. "He won't bother to ask."

Rex shook his head. "So when you retire..."

"The Power ruby chooses it's new host as much as I do," Jason answered.

"Yeah, that's what I figured," Rex said. He got up. "Welp, I'll leave you to it," he said and wandered out. He felt strangely unsettled. He couldn't figure out why. Maybe in time he'd feel like his old self again. After all, he helped end the Eclipse. He was the New Hope and when he grew up, he was going to be the Phantom Ranger.

-xEnd Chapter 17x-

## 18 - Business as Usual

Tai was in the Command Center. Things had not been quiet and peaceful since they destroyed the Sword of Darkness and turned everyone back to normal. Though Lammy had gotten word that Widow and Roki had left the moon in search of some unknown power, Zita remained and she was not making life easy for the newly reconstituted Rangers. Over the past couple of weeks, seemingly at random, Putties would appear and attack one or several of them. They were easily defeated without Morphing. There seemed to be no real rhyme or reason to it.

That wasn't why Tai was in the Command Center. He and Lani were meeting with Beez, Tommy and Jason. Anubis Cruger was once again requesting information. This time he wanted a face to face meeting to assure the Rangers that the information they'd be giving him would be in good hands. "I know I wasn't quite myself the last time this issue was addressed, but I kind of stand by my decision. However, I do like that he's willing to work with us. So which one of you want to go talk to him?" he asked and looked at the two older men.

Tommy and Jason looked at each other then back at Tai. "Why one of us?" Jason asked. He wasn't saying no. He just wanted to hear Tai's reason.

"Haven't you heard, we're retired," Tommy added.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest and gave them this look that was a both patient and impatient at the same time. "Right. How about both of you? That'd be a pretty good idea," he said, talking over them.

Lani bit back a laugh. "Tai," she admonished. He was slightly different these days, but in a good way. He still got a little tongue tied and dopey around her when he was nervous, but he was much less awkward. He even stopped trying to make himself look shorter by hunching slightly when he was around a lot of other people.

Tommy had a confused look on his face but Jason was biting back a smile. "What I'm asking is why us? You're the actives," he said.

"That's one of the many reasons why I want you two to meet with him. We're not a public team and we're kids. Yes, we're battling evil on a weekly basis but there's more credence to a successful business man with a franchise of well known martial arts establishments that produces top performing students and a man with a PhD in Paleontology with several successful and well known discoveries under his belt. Who would you rather talk to? A gawky kid in high school or two successful adults?" he asked.

"We also trust your judgment," Lani added. "If the two of you decide this Anubis Cruger is on the up and up then maybe we'll get in touch with him," she explained.

"What do think, Beez?" Jason asked.

"All the information I've gathered tells me that Anubis Cruger is an upstanding man with an exemplary

record. I believe meeting with him would not be amiss," she answered. She typed a few things on a console. She didn't have to actually type, but sometimes she enjoyed appearing normal. "I've sent informational dossiers to each of your personal computers. When is the best time to schedule the meeting?" she asked.

"Where would we be meeting? Isn't he an alien from Sirius?" Tommy asked.

"Yes, but he plans to come to Earth with a retinue in order to scout a location for a base here. He will be here at the end of the month," Beez answered.

"Then schedule a meeting as soon as possible," Jason said.

Tommy nodded to agree. That sounded fine to him. "I should go. I have about a thousand tests to grade," he declared. He teleported out of the Command Center.

"Let us know. I have a class starting soon," Jason said and teleported out as well.

"We should get going, too," Lani said and grinned up at Tai.

Tai fidgeted. "I'm not sure this is such a good idea. Dinner with your family? Grandpa is still in the mountains and I'm pretty sure two of your brothers hate me," he said. He still can't believe what he did to her brother Pua.

"Bring your sword. It'll be fine," she assured him. She crooked her finger and he obediently bent down so she could kiss him on the cheek. "Go get ready," she ordered playfully.

Tai finally gave in. He teleported to his house. He appeared in his room. He scratched a hand through his hair wondering what a person wore to meet his girlfriend's parents. He was contemplating calling Rex when he realized he was no longer alone in the house.

"Grandpa?" he called as he left his room. He basically leapt the stairs and appeared in the foyer. Grandpa was there bringing his over stuffed duffel bag through the door.

*"Don't just stand there gawking, Grandson, help an old man with his things,"* the old man grunted.

Tai grinned. He obediently grabbed the duffel. "Where'd you end up?" he asked. He didn't bother to ask Grandpa how he knew Tai had been 'off'. The old man had been a samurai three times as long as Tai had been alive. He took the bag up to Grandpa's room.

Grandpa shrugged as he began to unpack. *"I stayed with Haruda-san for a few days. Then I went to visit my nephews,"* he answered. *"Too many blasted ninja,"* he grumbled.

Tai bit back a chuckle. Akira Watanabe and his twin brother Kenji had been born and raised in Kyoto. They were taught Bushido. At some point, however, Kenji split from family tradition and began to study ninjutsu. It never seemed to be a bone of contention between the brothers as far as Tai knew. They came to America together and even though they settled in different places, kept in touch until the day Kenji died. Tai had rarely met any of his other family because Grandpa didn't travel often and neither did

Kenji's oldest son, Kanoi.

"I'm glad you're back. Put something decent on. You're coming to Lani's house for dinner with me," Tai stated as he left the room, giving the old man no time to argue. He heard an undignified harrumph. If bringing an Akira Watanabe sword was going to win brownie points with Lani's dad, then bringing Akira Watanabe should earn him a medal.

-x-

Billie slowly walked down the steps to Nathan's basement. She didn't hear any music, which was unusual. If he wasn't playing an instrument, he was listening to something while he worked out or just sat around pretending to do his homework. She slowed as she rounded the corner. He was stretched out in his bed.

She sighed, whether in relief or annoyance she was unsure, and began to creep back up the stairs. "Get back over here. I'm not asleep," he called out and sat up in the bed.

He scraped a hand through his short hair while she slowly edged closer to him. While he was being all evil and crap, he'd not only cut his hair off to a style that looked a little too much like Rex's for his liking but he also systemically threw out more than half his wardrobe and bought new things. All his old baggy indie-band tees were gone never to be found again. All his clothes fit him now. Showed him off. Ugh. Evil him was a narcissist. He'd liked showing off his sense of style and, yes, the frame it draped.

Evil him wasn't afraid to be himself.

"I'm not going to bite. Or pounce," he assured her. He paused the dvd he was watching. He scooted over on the bed and patted it. Looking vaguely uneasy, she did sit beside him. Before they'd been the It Couple of Evil, she wouldn't have thought twice about flopping down beside him on the bed. She wouldn't have thought once about it.

Billie stretched her feet out and stared at the comfy sneakers she'd managed to salvage. Nathan wasn't the only one who'd tossed out almost everything he owned. Taking fashion advice from him, 'Mina' had stocked Billie's closet full of stuff and she had no idea how to make any of it look worth a crap. And the shoes! How the heck did she ever wear them without killing herself?

"You look like you got dressed in the dark," Nathan quipped and gave her a crooked grin.

Billie sniffed. "I didn't come to discuss my wardrobe," she said.

"And why did you come?" he asked. She'd done an admirable job of avoiding him for days. He was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to see her again.

"Everyone else has forgiven me. For, you know, turning them evil or blocking their ability to morph and trying to take over the world and turn the rest of them evil," she said. Rationally she knew she wasn't responsible for her actions. Irrationally, that didn't stop the guilt. Frankly it frightened her a little what her mind had been capable of thinking of.

"Why wouldn't they?" Nathan asked.

Billie shook her head. "You haven't. The worst was the things I did to you," she quietly and glanced over at him briefly before looking away.

Nathan sighed. "Look, what happened, it happened. I don't want to stop being your friend over it," he said. He slung a arm around her shoulders and pulled her close.

"It happened a lot," she murmured but didn't resist the hug. "I don't want to you to stop being my friend," she said.

"That's never going to happen," he assured her. He squeezed her tight for a moment.

She pushed him away wrinkling her nose. "Okay, enough touchy-feely stuff. What the snicker doodles are you watching anyway?" she demanded.

"The first My Little Pony movie," he answered with a grin. "Want me to start over?"

"Sure. That one's my favorite," she said. She kicked off her shoes and stretched out on her stomach on the bed, facing his TV.

Nathan grinned. "I'll go pop us some popcorn," he said and hopped up. He smiled to himself as he went up the stairs. It actually wasn't going to be easy to go back to being just her friend, but if that was how she needed it to be then that's how it was going to be.

-x-

Fox walked out of his room at the Youth Center. He'd had his fun making Autumn and Win sweat a bit, but he finally consented to come back to the Youth Center. You could only kick a pair of puppies for so long before it stopped being fun. That's what it felt like whenever he saw them. They were both so hang-dog and pouty. Finally, he told them to get over it all ready and grabbed his bag from Rex's basement and brought it over. That seemed to cheer them up.

He turned to find the twins blocking the hallway. Each of them had her arms crossed over her chest. "Er...problems?" he asked nervously. A united front from Spring and Summer was never a good sign.

"And just where have you been?" Spring demanded.

"You totally abandoned us to Snippy and Snappy," Summer added.

"You owe us," they said together.

"What do I owe you?" he asked warily.

"Where were you really? You weren't at Rex's the whole time."

"We know. Rena told us."

Fox fidgeted from foot to foot.

"You two, leave Fox alone," Autumn said as she came up behind them. "Where he was is no concern of yours. Come on. Your shifts are about to start," she said.

Spring and Summer gave him narrow eyed looks that promised this wasn't nearly through. They walked off past Autumn who was finally just being her *normal* bossy self. That they could handle.

"I'll be back for my shift soon," he said.

"Where are you off to?" she asked. She had slightly less guilt than her brother. She had just been snippy and irritable. They'd been left in charge of Fox and though they may have slacked off during the being evil incident, he was back where he belonged and she got to be as nosy as ever.

Fox sighed. "To the dojo. Seifu demands my presence," he said.

"Alone?" she asked, concerned.

"I'm not a Power Ranger. I have nothing to worry about," Fox said. He said it a little snappier than he intended. It was true, he wasn't a Ranger. After that brief stint as a Power Ranger...he missed it. And almost everyone he knew was a Power Ranger. They still let him in the Command Center but he felt useless there now that the crisis was over. It kind of sucked.

Autumn gave him a soft smile. "Ok, but you still have your communicator. Be careful," she admonished him.

"Right," he said and left the Youth Center the back way. He made it to the Dojo without mishap as he expected. Why would anyone bother him?

Rex was waiting for him after he changed into his work-out gear. "You're late, grasshopper," he said.

"Sorry, seifu," Fox said.

Rex shrugged. He was trying not to be grumpy but for some reason, he felt edgy. "I have something for you," he said. He went to a long bag and brought out two wooden swords. "These have been tailor made for your lopsided and unsightly frame," he said and pointed the handles toward him.

Fox ignored the good-natured insults and took the swords. They were well-made. He didn't know a lot about such things, but he suspected they'd been crafted to be balanced just like a pair of real swords. "Uh, thank you?" he said.

"You're welcome. I suppose you're wondering why," he said.

"Something like that," Fox answered.

Rex pulled a second set out of the bag. He gave them experimental swings. They appeared longer and



more well used than Fox's shiny new ones.

"Traditionally, Tai and I use shinai when we practice kendo. Grandpa, the wise old samurai he is, had us each make a set of boken that suited our frames. We've often had to make new one as we got bigger or they broke. He said a samurai should know how to use a sword with either hand. To that end, we developed a dual sword technique that uses some of the principles of kendo mixed with karate and our own flare.

"After reviewing footage from your fight with Wood, I decided you'd be well suited to it," he said. "Any objections?" he asked.

"Not really," Fox answered warily.

"Good, then if all goes according to plan, you'll be using those boken like they're a part of you. Let's get to it," Rex said and for the next hour showed his pupil the basics of the technique.

He finally let Fox go but hung around himself, practicing. He never competed in kendo, and he rarely ever actually used a sword; he had one that Grandpa made for him; so few really knew that he could or that he was good at it. Only people who have witnessed him sparring with Tai, and understood just how good Tai was.

In the middle of his practicing, he spun around, realizing he wasn't alone. "You shouldn't sneak up on someone with a pair of weapons," he said to his observer.

"I wasn't sneaking up on you. I was standing at a safe distance in the doorway," Melody answered.

Rex raised a brow, slightly surprised by the tart answer. Since they'd been there, she'd been the quieter of the two space girls. Zara could be quite snarky.

"What's with that look?" she asked.

Rex shook his head. He grabbed a towel and wiped his face. "You shouldn't be wandering around alone," he said.

"I'm not. I came with Zara, Tori and Chloe. I was just the first one to Room 3," she said. "You shouldn't wander around alone either," she admonished him.

"I planned on teleporting, thanks," he said with a slight smile. "You're feistier than you usually let on, aren't you?" he asked.

She blushed a little and bit her lip. He chuckled. "I think it's cute," he said as he packed up his boken. She blushed even more. "I'll leave you ladies to it," he said and said and prepared to teleport.

"Wait. Is everything okay?" she asked.

He frowned at her slightly. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I don't know. You seem kind of distracted lately," she said. She glanced back when she heard the other girls approaching. By the time she looked back at him, he was gone. She sighed. It was none of her business after all.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Moriko watched Zita prowl around a table where a map of Angel Grove and its outlying areas was displayed. "What are we doing?" she asked.

"I'm studying the Rangers," Zita answered. She drew her finger in a wobbly circle outside of the city. "What is this area?" she asked, frowning.

Moriko approached. The area was generally flat, but it did include a section of forest and little of the foothills near the city. "I don't know. What's so special about it?" she asked.

"That's where the Red Ranger guy lives," Griff stated. He was never far away from Moriko's side unless she was secretly visiting Rei in which case he was secretly visiting Lammy and occasionally Taran.

Zita frowned. "How do you know?" she asked.

"Followed him home one day," Griff answered with a shrug. It hadn't been random. Lammy had asked him to keep an eye on Tai while he was evil.

"Where exactly?" Zita asked and gestured to the map.

Griff studied the map. "Here. There's a pond here, the house is here, the forge is back over here--"

"Forge?" Zita asked as magical markers began appearing where he indicated, forming a miniature Google Maps style view of the property.

"That's the training ground. The cherry trees aren't there either, they're about here on the back end of the property. The waterfall and the caves are here--"

Zita grabbed his arm to stop him from continuing. "Cherry trees? Caves? Training ground? What kind of place is this?" she demanded.

Griff shrugged again. How her sister could stand him, Zita had no idea. He was infuriating. She turned back to the table. "Why didn't I know about any of that? The telescope wouldn't show me anything," she hissed.

Moriko tried not to laugh. "It's magically safeguarded, isn't it, Griff?" she asked. That was the only explanation.

"Lammy seems to think so," he answered.

Zita narrowed her eyes slightly. Once again she was struck with the realization that Widow had often concentrated her efforts on the wrong Ranger. "I must see this place for myself," she said finally. She glanced at the table. The figure she had linked to the male Red Ranger had him away from the property at the Youth Center as well as several other figures she had associated with the Rangers.

"Have Finster create a monster. Send it to downtown Angel Grove. I don't care what it is as long as it's powerful enough to keep them distracted for awhile. Especially the male Red Ranger. Have some Putties attack some of the Rangers as well," she said. She walked off toward her room.

Moriko sighed. "I'd hoped with Widow and Roki gone, she'd be more open to the idea of embracing her true destiny. If anything, she's digging her heels in more," she grumbled. "Come on, let's go get a monster started," she said.

"Right behind you," Griff grunted. If it were up to him, he'd leave Zita here to rot but she was important to Moriko and Moriko was important to him.

-X-

Danny, Billie, Wood and Nathan were heading toward a movie. It was actually the first time the four of them had been able to hang out together since even before the whole Sword of Darkness incident.

"We need to do this more often," Wood declared.

"Yeah, we do," Nathan agreed.

"Part of me is resisting the urge to make some droll comment about how the three of you had plenty of quality time, but I'm feeling benevolent today," Danny said.

Far from being put off, Wood actually snickered. "You'd think that," he said, a wide grin pulling at his face.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Danny asked.

"Don't listen to him. Fox addled something in his head. He hasn't been right since," Billie stated sharply.

Wood snickered again. "Fox got me in the belly. Nothing wrong with my head or my memory," he said

"I seem to remember you spending most of the time pouting because Tori wouldn't talk to you or return your calls and texts," Nathan said.

Wood pouted. "Thanks for reminding me," he grumbled.

Danny snickered that time. He clapped a hand on Wood's back. "I get the feeling you were asking for that," he said.

"He was," Billie and Nathan answered at the same time. Even Wood had to laugh at that. Soon they were all laughing for no definable reason.

Putties appeared in front of them.

"This is just great," Danny grumbled.

"Unfortunately for them, things have changed lately," Billie said.

"Let's see what youse can do," Danny invited as the Putties attacked.

-x-

Rei walked backwards down the street. She was facing Sora, Taran and Lammy. "Just why isn't it a good idea for me to enroll at AGU, too?" she demanded.

"No one's saying it's a bad idea," Taran started.

"I am," Lammy said. That earned her an exasperated look from her brother. "It's the truth. Rei, you stink at subterfuge, you can't lie worth a penny and you've only been a single entity for a few months," she stated.

Sora reached out and stopped Rei from going down. She'd stumbled on a break in the sidewalk. "Though it could have been phrased a little better, Lammy has a point," he said, though he hated to disappoint her. Her face fell in a pout.

Lammy rolled her eyes. "All I mean is that for now working at the Youth Center is a better way for you to get a handle on being you. So far since emerging on your own you've had to chase down and fix him," she jerked her thumb at Sora, "Then Winter, then run off to do your mother's bidding, putting yourself in danger--"

"Something I'm still a bit peeved about," Sora interjected.

--and then helping Rex in his insanely hopeful plan, that somehow miraculously worked, to fix Nathan and ultimately destroy the Sword of Darkness. You haven't had time to just be Rei. You need to figure out who that is before you try and integrate yourself into a complex social hierarchy like college," Lammy stated.

"Maybe next term you can enroll. Just concentrate on yourself for now," Taran said. "And Rex's plan was sound. You don't give enough credence to the power of love," he told his sister. She just rolled her eyes again.

"Why do you want to go to college anyway?" Sora asked.

"I don't know. You guys go. It's a normal thing to do, right?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah but mainly Sora and I go because we have to. To get jobs when we graduate," Taran explained. Sora nodded.

"I go because it's part of my cover," Lammy said with a shrug.

Rei looked at the three of them and almost laughed. Taran was still under the delusion that he was going to have a normal-as-possible human existence. She wasn't going to burst his bubble yet. At least Lammy was honest about her motives. She sighed. "I'm definitely enrolling next fall," she declared stoutly and turned around just as a collection of Putties appeared.

"This is why I can't ever get any 'me' time," Rei complained.

The Putties attacked.

-x-

Chloe and Tori were having some shop therapy. "I missed this. Shopping with someone with some taste I mean. I love Autumn to bits but all she ever seems to like is cammo this and cammo that and don't get me started on Billie," she said. "I guess being evil doesn't make you fashion forward," she added.

Tori snickered. "Well, I'm glad you had such an awful time being evil. It wasn't fun for me either," Tori said with a pout.

"Who said it was awful?" Chloe said and widened her eyes.

Tori bumped her arm. "You better be joking," she warned.

"Joking badly," Chloe said with a sigh. "Come on, let's go find something hot. And maybe a couple coffees, too," she said and squared her shoulders.

Tori giggled. "You got a particular something hot in mind?" she asked pointedly.

Chloe let out another exaggerated sigh. "No. My dream guy -- er, my realistic dream guy -- hasn't appeared before me," she said. "Are you thinking about trying to match-make?" she demanded.

"Me? Nope. For half a minute I thought maybe you and Rex, but--"

Chloe snorted with laughter. "That's so funny. Rex is super hot, yes, but it's nowhere even close to being like that for us," she said.

"I know, I know. I just thought it before I knew that you guys were partners. Then you went and got all squishy over Hayden," Tori grinned.

Chloe blushed. "What's not to get squishy about? The eyes, the body, the accent?" she added. "He set a high standard so you just forget about match-making," she said, wagging her finger at her friend.

Tori would have held her hands up in defeat if they hadn't been full of shopping bags. Then she dropped them. "Girl, we got company," she said. Chloe whipped around and dropped her bags as Putties appeared around them.

"These definitely aren't dream guys," she said. Tori shook her head. The two girls stood back to back and prepared to defend themselves as the Putties attacked.

-x-

"So how did the big dinner go?" Rex asked Tai as they got drinks from the Juice Bar.

Tai took a bracing drink of his tea. "How do I explain it? Lani's dad almost fainted when he met Grandpa and the rest of the night, he fawned. Lani's mom was unfailingly polite which I don't think was actually a good sign. Her older brothers glared at me all night but I don't think they mentioned the 'incident' to their parents. Noa was, well, the same as usual," he explained. Noa had been a life saver to be honest.

"Yeah, I'm sure the 'incident' didn't win you any favors at all," Rex remarked.

"I'd apologize but what do I say? Sorry I almost broke your arm, I was under the influence of an evil sword at the time?" Tai sighed.

"This is Angel Grove. Is that so far fetched?" Rex asked with a chuckle.

Tai snorted. "They grew up in Hawaii. I don't think it'd come off quite the same as it would to an Angel Grove native," he said ruefully.

"Take it from me, they aren't going to like you no matter what you do," Winter interjected. "It's a big brother's prerogative. Especially if they were inclined to dislike you from the beginning," he added. "From here on, you're just screwed," he even managed to grin at Tai.

"You're in a disgustingly good mood today," Tai grumbled. Rex and Winter chuckled at that remark.

"I'm trying to stay positive. We finally managed to convince Fox to come back, the business didn't suffer unduly to my lack of giving a care, and AJ isn't just ignoring my calls but Randi and Jason can't get a hold of him either. I'm also going to dinner at Lammy's later," he said. "Things are definitely okay," he said.

Tai couldn't help but smile. "I'll let that go just this once then," he said ruefully. He watched as Lani, Manny and Holly came in. They waved at the three guys when they spotted them.

"Well, you stay and enjoy your good mood, we're going to go sit with some pretty girls," Rex said.

Winter chuckled. Their communicators beeped. Tai glanced around. Rex stood in front of him slightly and Winter leaned closer as if they were still in conversation. "Tai here," he said.

"Putties have appeared in several locations. They are being taken care of, but a monster has appeared near the Youth Center," Beez reported.

"All right, send anyone who isn't busy with Putties to the Youth Center," he said. He twisted his wrists. The three girls filed back out of the Youth Center. Winter shouted for one of the twins to cover him and he, Tai and Rex headed toward an empty area in the Youth Center.

"It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex!"

"Mastodon!"

"Stygimoloch!"

-x-

Zita appeared on the edge of what Grifforzer said to be the Red Ranger's property. She stretched out her arm. She gasped in shock when her hand hit the barrier that would keep her out. So, there was a magical ward on the property. How strange. She lightly placed her hand against the barrier ignoring the discomfort radiating up her arm and began walking along the perimeter.

Hopefully she'd find the source before her arm fell off.

-x-

Wood bounced, jumping over a file of Putties. He landed in a crouch and swept around in a kick that locked several of them off their feet. He hit them in the Zs while they were down and spun out of the way.

Danny head-butted a Putty and kicked out, connected with the Z and pushing himself back. "Note to us: the ability to summon weapons unmorphed," he said to Billie as he ducked a Putty and used a force-field to push them away from him.

"Duly noted," Billie said. Even though she'd trained hard and improved drastically under Tai's instructions as Mina, she still wasn't at the same caliber as Danny but she was doing pretty good, she thought. She'd managed to take out a few Putties and hadn't fallen down once.

"That'd be nice. Levitating is best if I have my bow in hand," Nathan said and back flipped out of the way of a Putty triple team. He landed in the air then dropped, crumpling one of them and kicking the other two in the Z's.

"Watch out!" A flying garbage can lid smacked a Putty in the chest just as it tried to sneak up behind a distracted Danny. It bounced off of him and hit several more in a quite illogical pattern. Zara came running out of an alley and jumped. She wrapped her legs around a Putty's neck and used her momentum to throw him to the ground. She punched him in the Z and got to her feet.

"I owe ya one. Nice moves," Danny said appreciatively.

"Nice toss," Billie said and the four of them regrouped since all the Putties were gone

"I do what I can," Zara declared. "There's a monster. You better get going," she said with a sigh.

Danny nodded. He twisted his cuffs. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

"Triceratops!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Smilodon!"

-x-

Rei made her staff appear. She whirled and swung into a Putty and hit him in the Z. She took a moment to appreciate the fact that Zita was smart enough to send a good number of Putties to face the group of inhumans. It also sent off alarm bells. "Zita's up to something," she said as she jabbed another Putty in the Z.

"Whatever it is will have to wait," Taran said as his fingers grew into elongated claws. Lammy followed suit. The two of them made quite the duo. They stood back to back and waited for the Putties to come to them. When the Putties converged, they sprang into action. They kicked and slashed their way through the creatures.

"And here I don't have a staff I can summon or built in claws," Sora griped as he jumped, ducked and rolled out of sudden deluge of Putties trying to pin him down.

"Yeah, but there's three of you," Rei reminded him as she swung her staff around to give him some breathing room.

"Ah, right y'are," he purred, his usually faint accent thickening momentarily. He split into three. Simultaneously, the three of him cracked his knuckles and grinned. The three Soras sprang into action, wading into Putty attack. As a synchronized team he fought the Putties.

"Why does it feel like for every one we put down two more take its place?" Lammy asked as they regrouped.

"Because Zita is up to something," Rei growled. She hated that she didn't know what her sister was thinking. Mori seemed to be just as frustrated with the other triplet as she was. She slammed the end of her staff against the sidewalk and summoned her armor.

"Well, if this is the way it has to be," Sora as he regrouped into a single entity. He twisted his wrists. Lammy and Taran did the same.

"It's Morphin' Time! Stegosaurus!"

"Velociraptor!"

"Ceratosaurus!"

-x-

Superficially, Tori and Chloe looked like easy pickings. Two girls, alone, one was short and compact, the other thin and willowy but there was nothing easy about either of them. Tori had trained to become part



of the Sol Reavers for longer than she could remember while Chloe had dedicated most of her life to martial arts.

So even they were just two girls, they could handle a few Putties. A lot of Putties was a little trickier, however, even for them. Chloe tensed and densified as a Putty came barreling at her. He crashed into her and went flying, disintegrating as he did because he'd hit his Z dead on. She sprang into immediate action. A flying tiger kick took out another one. She used the moment from hitting him to bounce herself backwards and jabbing another one in the base of the skull. He went down hard and disintegrated with her on top of him. Making a face she jumped to her feet.

"They picked the wrong chicks to mess with today," Chloe declared and blew her bangs out of her face. "Ugh, it took me ages to get my hair right," she complained and took her aggravation out of on a tougher than usual Putty.

"Tell me about it," Tori grumbled. "I just went to salon yesterday," she said and tossed her head. She attacked, going in low, using her small size and agility to her advantage. She was actually not to use her sonic shriek too much. It gave her a sore throat when overused. "Did they get taller?" she demanded suddenly, peeved at how difficult they were being about putting their Z's in the path of her attacks.

"Maybe you shrank from Wood withdrawal," Chloe quipped as they came back to back again. She rubbed her shoulder from a lucky kick.

"That's not it," Tori said as they turned in a circle watching the Putties as they began advancing on them again. "I've had a lot of Wood since he's been uneviled," she said.

"TMI," Chloe declared. "We might have to elevate things," she said.

Tori was about to agree but suddenly a commotion came from beyond the Putties. They were going down. A boy wielding two wooden swords and girl with none had come onto the scene.

"Did Fox Oliver just save our hides?" Chloe asked.

"And Mel," Tori agreed.

"Yeah, well Mel was awesome to begin with," Chloe said with a grin.

"You guys looked like you needed some help," Melody said. She ducked a swing from a Putty and spun backwards into a high kick, her heel crashing into his Z.

Fox was getting used to the weight of the broken Rex had given him, but their length was still a little unwieldy to him. Still, his lessons with first Trini and Mel and now Rex were coming in handy. "Don't worry, I won't go bandying it about," he assured the two girls.

"In other words you can't wait to tell everyone you saved me and Tori from Putties," Chloe said dryly as she jumped and crashed into a Putty trying to sneak up behind Mel. "Just remember I get to tell Rex how well you use those toothpicks here," she added.

Fox grimaced. "My lips are sealed," he said. Truthfully, he was taking to the technique very well for a novice but Chloe would die before admitting that to him. He slashed two Putties, using his boken in unison.

"Don't listen to her, sweetie. I'll give Rex a glowing report," Tori assured him. Frustrated, she screamed at several Putties coming toward her. They clutched their heads and stumbled back.

Melody used it to her advantage and took them out. "Me, too," she said and winked at Fox. The Putties were finally defeated.

Chloe slung an arm around Mel's shoulders. "You just want an excuse to talk to him," she said.

Mel colored. "Don't you have a monster you need to help with?" she asked.

Tori giggled. "We do," she agreed more seriously. She twisted her wrists and made her cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Pterodactyl!"

"Mastodon!"

After the other two girls Morphed and teleported, Fox gave Mel a sly look. "So that's what it's like," he said.

"Can it or you'll be eating those boken," Mel told him. He held his hands up in surrender but he still had that Fox face that she didn't trust. "Let's just go," she said and teleported to the Command Center. A snickering Fox followed.

-x-

A large monster that resembled a lobster in a lab coat with short tentacles on its face was leaving a wake of barnacle encrusted wreckage. This included people, animals, cars, street signs, telephone poles, mailboxes and whatever else his horrific loogies landed on. Even unfortunate Putties that got in the way.

His tentacles wiggled as he began to make disgusting noises, gathering up another wad of spit. Red, black, yellow, and green energy hit him in the chest. He choked and gagged, rubbing his chest. "Who dares interrupt Dr. Loogvig?" he demanded, looking around angrily. His voice sounded both like he was underwater and had a stopped up nose.

"We did," the male Red Ranger said as he holstered his blaster. The female Red Ranger, the male Black Ranger, the female Yellow Ranger and both Green Rangers faced him.

"You'll regret that," he said and began gathering phlegm once again. He spit and sent the Rangers scattering. Everywhere his spit touched crusted over with barnacles.

"He's even more disgusting than the bug monster," Yellow said, trying not to gag.

"Let's just try not to get loogied," male Red suggested and came from his hiding spot. The others did the

same. He drew his TyrannoSword. He ran in close, slashing at Loogvig, but the monster's dense pincers blocked and slashed at the Ranger. He sparked and stumbled back, gripping his chest.

Loogvig hocked a loogie. Hit caught Red's sword arm and encrusted him against a wall.

Loogvig didn't have time to celebrate his victory as he was surrounded by Rangers. Female Green came in with her Power Staff. He was quick to block and had her jumping back as he attempted to snap the Staff with his claws. "You aren't getting my Staff," she said crossly.

"Have some of mine," male Black said and slid between them and extended the end of his Power Scythe right between the monster's beady eyes. It hit him with enough to force to jolt him backwards. Loogvig let out a gurgling roar and spit a them. Black tackled her just in time to avoid the wad of sea snot.

Yellow sped in close but found that even though she was faster than he was, her Power Grips were nearly useless against his armored body. She skid to a halt with a huff. "Win, go," she said, an idea forming. A last ditch effort to get the upper hand.

Male Green had already summoned his Stygian Armor and ran forward with the Stygian Blade. With the Power Sword, female Red joined him, teaming up, forcing the monster to defend against two of them. He so far has been doing an admirable job.

"If you have a plan," Red prompted her friend.

"It's like double dutch. Just waiting for the perfect time to jump in," Yellow said. She suddenly zoomed forward and jumped, landing on male Green's shoulders. He hastily steadied her even as she used her Grips to go for the monster's eyes, the only unprotected part of him that she could see.

Enraged, Loogvig lashed out wildly. All three of the Rangers went flying. Eyes smarting, he began to rapidly spit.

"Get out of the way!" male Red tried to warn them others even as he pulled on his arm, trying to free himself. It was no use. It was as if it were raining monster spit and the five of them ended up pinned to various places in various ways.

Gritting his teeth, male Red jerked his arm. The barnacle crust gave way. It still coated his arm, making it stiff. Fortunately, he was a switch-hitter.

Squinting at him, Loogvig was flabbergasted. "Harsher measures are needed here I see," he bumbled. As illogical as it seemed he pulled very large laser rifle from his lab coat. He leveled it at Red and fired.

-x-

Zita wasn't sure how long she'd been walking the perimeter of Tai Stapleton's property. Her arm definitely felt like it was going to fall off. She paused as a sweet smell filled her nostrils and the sound of bells reached her ears.

She sped up. She gasped when the wind suddenly picked up, fluttering her ruffly skirts. Cherry blossoms

whipped around her almost playfully. Gritting her teeth she looked around. That hadn't felt entirely natural but she could no intelligence behind such an act. Yet the further she went now, the more she felt the well of magick energy.

She quickened her pace, almost running. She slid to a halt when the trees came into view. Pale pink blossoms covered the branches even as the playful wind tugged at them, sending petals scurrying away. Some teased the old man in the painfully colorful clothes. Short and stocky with a shock of iron colored hair, he was still a powerful man even at his age.

Grandpa was hanging a string of bells on each tree. "*Don't just stand gawking. You're taller than I am. Show some respect to your elders and help,*" he said gruffly in Japanese.

Zita stiffened her spine. No one had ever spoken to her in such a way without serious repercussions. Yet she found herself going over to the old man. "*You think age earns you my respect, old man?*" she asked even as she took the string of bells from him and hung them from one of the lower branches of one of the trees.

Grandpa stacked his hands behind his back and looked at the girl in the black and purple doll's dress. He considered her question. "*It is true even fools age but age is the only time fools will be respected. Yes. I believe age earns me your respect,*" he answered.

Zita narrowed her eyes at the old man. He had a way of looking at her that was unsettling. She sniffed and gazed at the now tinkling trees. The well of power was strong. She could see the wards both tied around and carved into the trees themselves. "*What is an old man and a scrawny boy hiding beyond these trees?*" she murmured.

"*Come and see for yourself,*" Grandpa invited.

Zita looked at him, startled. Then she laughed. "*Yes. It's true even fools age. You wouldn't invite me in so readily if you knew who I was,*" she said. Grandpa surprised her by grabbing her hand and pulling her through the thickest part of the barrier; the space between the two trees. It was shockingly easy. She glared down at him and jerked her hand free. "*Touch me again and you will never live to regret it. Should I tell you who I am?*" she asked icily.

Grandpa once again gave her an unsettling look. "*Feel free to look around, but I suggest you leave before my grandson returns. He's still upset with being controlled by the Sword of Darkness and therefore, you, Zita-hime,*" he said and walked away from her.

Unease crawled down Zita's spine. She had no idea how to react to this old man, who was even more unnerving than his wretched grandson.

Grandpa paused and turned back. "*Would you care for some tea before you begin your tour?*" he asked.

Zita had never felt so caught off guard. She found herself agreeing and she could not even begin to fathom why. She mutely followed as Grandpa led her to the main house.

What was she getting herself into?

-X-

Dr. Loogvig let the nose of his laser drop. He could hear the other Rangers calling out to their leader but there was no way he could have survived...that...attack...

Male Red managed to summon his Power Armor and throw his shield up. There was a furrow in the pavement nearly six feet long and up above his ankles but he'd survived. The best part was, the energy had managed to free his arm of the remaining barnacle crust. Interesting.

"But--but--How!" he demanded.

"You can thank Mina for that," female Blue declared. "Seems she came in handy for something," she added ruefully.

Loogvig spun around and saw that he was surrounded by even more Rangers. The last to arrive being the Gold, Silver and Electrum Rangers.

"Are we late?" Electrum asked and cocked her head at male Green and female Yellow. They were encrusted together, chest to chest.

"It's not what it looks like. Please don't kill me," Yellow said.

Electrum just shook her head and used her VelociRapier to break them apart.

"Brace yourself," Gold told male Black who'd been propelled against a wall and hung dangling from it by his shoulder. He gave Gold a thumbs up. He was surprisingly okay up there. Gold smashed the StegoMace into the barnacle crust and went to help female Green get leg unstuck from a manhole cover. Black dropped to the ground and rolled his shoulder.

Male Red used his Power Armor's gauntlet to free his partner while three Silver Rangers, female Black, male Blue and a hovering male Pink Ranger kept Dr. Loogvig busy. "Thanks," she murmured.

"Anytime," he assured her. "Billie! Does he have a weak point?" he demanded.

Female Blue was already analyzing the monster. "Manny had it right. His eyes," she said finally.

"That's what I thought. Taran? Who do you think is stronger, you or me?" he asked. Gold shook his head, having no idea.

It was female Blue who answered him. "You are especially in the Armor. It was specifically designed to draw on and enhance your ability but you've already drawn on too much energy withstanding that attack," she warned him.

"Tai, whatever it is you're thinking--" female Red started.

"He'll do it anyway. We just got to watch his back," male Black said.

"Just have the Cannon ready," male Red said. He gave his partner's arm a comforting squeeze. "Everyone else, blitz him now!" he ordered.

Loogvig heard the order but didn't entirely have time to realize what that meant because the Rangers did exactly that. Three Silver Rangers ran toward him and jumped, all three swords raised. He intended to defend against all three but the Ranger recombined mid-air and crashed into him with the CeratoSword at full strength. He groaned but grabbed the blade in one pincer and threw the Ranger.

He didn't have time to gloat as the Black Rangers came at him. The blades of both Axe and Scythe threw up sparks but knock the boy aside and spit at the girl. He didn't see that he'd managed to practically cover her entire helmet. The Green Rangers came in next. The Blade sparked across his chest and the Staff went for his middle. He grabbed their arms in his pincers and turned in a sharp circle and tossed them.

While slightly dizzy, the Blue Rangers attacked. The girl went in and slashed her Sai across his middle a few times and disappeared when he tried to knock her aside. The boy came in and jabbed his Lance in his face. "Augh!" he spit but the loogie only harmlessly hit a force-field. When the force-field dropped, male Yellow jumped him, slashing at his face with the Daggers. Loogvig grabbed him around the middle and threw him at the Yellow girl but she speedily dodged. She grabbed at his lab coat with her Grips. He wrestled it back, which upset her momentum and she went skidding and tumbling off.

It was a short lived victory as Loogvig found himself having to protect himself from arrows as the Pink boy rushed at him shooting arrows with each step. Then he jumped. Just behind him the little Pink girl whirled around him, slashing him with her Fans throwing up sparks.

Loogvig gurgled with rage. These Rangers were seriously getting on his nerves. He turned his attention to Electrum as she artfully fenced with him using her VelociRapier. He easily parried each of her jabs and slashes. She began to speed up and switching hands, confusing him, and forcing him to keep up suddenly she was gone and he looked around. She'd rolled out of the way as Gold smashed his StegoMace into face. Fine lines began to form, radiating from his eye socket. He roared and hocked his biggest loogie yet at the shiny Ranger. Gold was almost a barnacle encrusted statue as he struggled to free himself.

Loogvig thought victory was nearing so he began reaching for his laser gun once more. Loogvig was wrong.

"Magnum Power Cannon!" female Red summoned.

Loogvig fumbled with the laser. He was too late. Male Red ran forward and jumped. He summoned every ounce of strength he possessed and wrapped his hands around the hilt of the TyrannoSword. He crashed it in the space between the monster's eyes. The shell, already weakened shattered revealing a pinkish shrimp looking head.

Male Red barely had strength to regain his balance. He shouldn't have bothered. Male Black ran into his side and pushed him out of the way.

"Magnum Blast!" The blast from the Cannon exploded into the opening male Red created. He exploded. And stayed exploded.

Female Red left the Cannon and ran over to where male Black was tapping the now un-Morphed Tai's cheeks. "He's alive," he assured her. She sighed in relief but cradled his head. Tension filled the air as they continued to wait. "Billie? What's with the monster?" he asked.

Female Blue was analyzing on her computer again. "He seems to be lacking the growth serum that's been infused in other monsters," she answered finally.

"So it's over? That's it?" female Black demanded.

Blue nodded hesitantly. "I believe so," she said.

"Well...that's..." Gold, who was freed from the barnacle crust when the monster exploded, said.

"Odd," Electrum said.

"Well, we'd better go then. People are starting to stir again," female Red said. She teleported herself and Tai to the Command Center. He'd need a mdi-bed for a bit. The other Rangers left the battle scene wondering if that was truly the end of it and why.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

"Oh, la! Looks like Finster used the wrong batch of clay to make that monster. Wonder how that happened," Moriko said musingly as she spun the telescope idly away from her.

"It does make one wonder," Griff said and raised a brow at her.

She widened her eyes and tried to look innocent. It wasn't a look she pulled off very well at all. "What *could* you be suggesting?" she asked. She sashayed away from the throne room. He followed her mutely a slight grin teasing the corners of his mouth. They were enjoying a leisurely meal when Zita reappeared. "Why sister, dear, you look positively perplexed. What did you find?" she asked.

Zita scowled and passed them on the way to her map. She began filling in details of the Watanabe land. Moriko watched, raising her brows. "You found out quite a bit. How?" she asked.

Zita huffed. "That doddering old fool invited me in! He even gave me tea and let me have the run of the place! I could have done anything!" she exploded suddenly.

Moriko was intrigued. "So, why didn't you?" she ventured to ask.

All the wind rushed out of Zita. "I don't know," she said, scowling. "Leave me alone," she hissed and left the room, her nosy sister and that lumbering thug that followed her around. She had no idea why she didn't level the place just to prove she could. She should have. Why didn't she? She didn't know.

*She didn't know.*

-X-

Sometime later, Lani left Tai's side. According to the read outs on the medi-bed he was just sleeping, so she decided to let him sleep and recover his strength. She stopped short when she found Billie alone in the Power Chamber. "What's up?" she asked and wandered over to the other girl.

Billie glanced at her. "I'm making improvements to your Power Armor. Holly was smart to modify my diagram to an overlay of your form. It's been working well enough, but as I said before, it was created specifically for Tai and his genetic power," she explained. She gave an apologetic smile.

Lani nodded. "I was always aware that mine wasn't really up to snuff because of the rush job to outfit it. What are you doing to it?" she asked.

"Adjusting the fit and strength enhancement. I can give you a boost of strength drawing from the Power Sword rather than a genetic ability. Not quite up to Tai's level but you might beat Win arm wrestling," Billie explained and gave a ghost of a smile. "The Power Sword is still one of the most powerful weapons ever created," she said.

Lani grinned. "At least there's that," she said with a grin. She squeezed Billie's shoulder. "Thanks," she said.

"I was going to do it anyway eventually, in case you were feeling left out," Billie remarked.

"I wasn't," Lani said with a laugh. "See ya later," she said and teleported out, leaving Billie to do as she would.

Billie went back to work on the console, happily having the Command Center all to herself. This was how it was meant to be. She was firmly putting Mina behind her.

x-End Chapter 18-x



## 19 - From the Moon with Love

After putting Fox through his paces at the Scott Dojo, Rex wandered into the Youth Center. Fox, he noted, rarely chose to hang around the Youth Center on his days off. Rex supposed he couldn't blame him since he also had to live there. Usually feeling great after a work-out, he felt kind of deflated instead. He half considered ordering some extreme chocolate concoction but decided against it. Last time he got some chocolate, people thought he was deeply depressed and liable to jump off a bridge. Instead he ordered a juice from Spring.

"It's getting that time of year," she remarked and gestured at the profusion of glittery shimmery pink and red hearts decorating the Youth Center. "What's it coming to when Tai Stapleton has a date to the big do and Rex Hart doesn't?" she asked as she gave him his juice.

Rex narrowed his eyes at the mischievous expression on her face. "Since you enjoy gossiping with my sister so much, you can get her to pay for this," he said and flashed her his best smile. He wandered off toward where Tai and Lani was cozied up.

Summer reached over and pushed her sister's mouth closed. "I'll make a note to charge Rena for the juice next time she's in," she said.

Spring scowled at her. "That smile shouldn't be legal," she grumbled and flounced off into the kitchen with her sister's laughter following her.

Tai glanced at his friend when he scooted into the booth across from where he and Lani were sitting without so much as a "pardon me". "You know, this might have been a date," he said.

"Then you shouldn't have come to the Youth Center," Rex pointed out. He winked at Lani.

Lani snickered. "He has a point," she said.

Tai nodded. He watched his friend broodingly chew on his straw rather than actually drink the juice. He followed his gaze. He saw Kat leading a small ballet class. There was going to be a little Valentine's Day show there before a big dance. Though a nurse by occupation these days due to an injury, Kat still taught a small group ballet at the Center. She was working on a routine for the show and had recruited a few older beginners. Nathan, Tori, Melody, Chloe and even Wood were dressed in leotards and learning the routine.

"I'm somewhat surprised Kat didn't try to get you participate," Lani remarked innocently.

"She wanted beginners," Rex said with a shrug.

"Rex took ballet for two years when we were kids," Tai explained. "And tap. And ballroom."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" she said. "Why are you glaring at them?" she asked.

"I'm not. I'm just thinking while facing that general direction," he answered.

"Whacha thinkin' about?"

Rex dug into his pocket and pulled some money out. "Give this to Spring or Summer for the juice," he said and scooted out of the booth. Stuffing his hands in his pockets, he left the Youth Center.

Lani gaped after him. "What the--? Tai--"

"I'm after him," Tai said and kissed her cheek. He stood and followed his friend out. He paced a few feet behind Rex.

"I know you're back there," Rex said.

"I know," Tai answered.

Rex sighed. He turned slightly, pausing to let Tai catch up to him. "Don't ask me what's wrong because I don't know," he said. "Just let me sort it out in my head first. Okay?"

"Fine by me but I had to come out. Lani expected it," Tai said.

Rex chuckled. "You looking forward to finally having a Valentine's Day date?" he asked.

"You looking forward to finally not having one?" Tai shot back.

"See, there's that. Why does everyone seem to think I couldn't get a date if I wanted one?" he asked.

"Rena's a brat and I never said you couldn't get one if you wanted one. I just have a feeling you won't. I don't know why, though. You should. Let loose for a bit. Enjoy the day. Forget about whatever it is that's worrying you for a few hours," he prompted.

Rex thought about that as he walked for a bit. "Sometimes I forget why you're Leader Boy. Maybe I'll do just that. Go back to Leader Girl and tell her we talked. We laughed, we cried, we hugged it out," he said.

Tai scoffed. "No one would believe that even if I could bring myself to say it," he said. "Where you heading now?" he asked.

"Rat's been slacking off in her training lately. It's time for vengeance," Rex said. He left Tai laughing on the street.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Moriko floated into her sister's command center, which was basically a sitting room where Zita obsessed

over the Power Rangers. She'd been a little worried about her sister since she visited the Watanabe land. "Zita! Let's have a party. A Valentine's Day party! It's just the thing! Celebrating a bloody massacre and love all at once! It can be themed. We can all wear blood red and black. I can invite Goldarr and Scorpina. Oh and Elgar! I know the perfect blind date for him," she clapped her hands together thoughtfully as she mentally went over her guest list.

"Are you out of your mind?" Zita demanded. "What are you even talking about?" she demanded. She rubbed her forehead. "Oh, I think I'm getting a headache," she muttered.

"Valentine's Day. It's when humans celebrate love. It's all a bit blah and cliché. I'd play up the bloody massacre angle. I can just imagine the great hall decorated with oozing blood now," Moriko answered. "Oh, Griff would be so handsome in a bloody velvet tuxedo and black shirt," she sighed dreamily as she imagined it.

Zita was beyond listening. She pushed past her sister and went to Finster's lab. "Finster! Make me a monster that will turn love to hate," she said and her lips curled into a cruel smile.

Moriko shook her head. "Why don't we just kidnap the cutest one and force him to be your date to our ball instead of doing all that?" she asked. She really hadn't meant to give her an idea for a monster. She just wanted to celebrate being with Griff on a holiday like Valentine's Day and possibly cheer Zita up. "What about Rex? He's a looker and I bet he could charm the habit off a nun," she prompted.

Zita gave Moriko a disgusted look. "Make it snappy," she ordered Finster. "Have your ball if you must but leave me out of it. Don't you even dare think about setting me up on a blind date," she said and went back to her sitting room. She slammed the door and locked it.

Moriko pouted. She reached out and took Griff's hand when he came up behind her. "Didn't go well?" he asked as she leaned against his chest.

"We can have the ball but now she's in battle mode. Did you meet any hot guys in your other dimensional travels?"

"I doubt I'm the best judge," he said dryly.

Moriko thought about it. What kind of taste did her sister have? Rei separated because of Sora and she separated because of Griff. But what about Zita? "Hmm, I don't know. Someone that's a little like you and a little like Sora maybe?" she said. She felt Griff hesitate and turned to look up at him. "You thought of someone," she said, her mouth forming a small 'O' of surprise. She'd mostly been joking but he actually thought of someone.

"No, I didn't," he denied. Just so she would drop the subject he slid an arm around her waist and pulled her close. He dipped his head and kissed her until she melted and certainly forgot all about Zita. "Let's go to the room so you can try on ball gowns for me," he suggested.

Moriko sighed. "Okay. You win this time," she said and slid away. Tangling their fingers together, she led him to their room. She'd definitely come back to this subject. Eventually.

-X-

Later that night, Beez was quietly manning the Power Chamber while her android body recharged. At this time of night she'd even managed to pry Billie, Danny and Holly out of the Command Center for some sleep. She received an incoming message. Her holographic form shimmered and opened communications. "Zhane," she greeted when the face of a smiling blond man filled her screen. "I admit I am surprised to hear from you so soon," she said.

"About that," Zhane Rahl hesitated. "I'm landing on Earth in a few hours," he said.

It was rare for Beez to frown. "What about the mission?" she asked.

"We picked up a few leads before the situation changed," Zhane answered. "I intend to fulfill my promise," he said.

Another screen lit up as someone else accessed a terminal on the small craft they were on. A woman with blond streaked brown hair gave an irritated sort of sigh. "I have to stay on Earth for the time being Beez. Zhane and I talked it over and we both came to conclusion that since we aren't sure how long this will take, we don't want our first child born on this shuttle. Andros advised against my staying on KO-35. The situation there is too volatile. So we decided I would stay on Earth," Karone explained.

Beez smiled now. "I am sorry for the delay but I congratulate you both," she said. "I'll be expecting your arrival," she said.

"We'll call again before we land," Zhane assured her. They cut off communication. Beez frowned again. This was a delay she wasn't expecting. "Ay yi yi yi," she murmured to herself. She pre-programmed a message to be sent to Tai, Zara, Jason and Tommy in the morning informing them of the imminent arrival.

-X-

"Stop obsessively checking your watch. Beez will contact us when Zhane and Karone land," Melody told Zara as they walked toward the Youth Center. Mel was going to her class with Kat. They were putting the final touches on the routine that day so they could do the show with the young ones the next day. Zara was just grabbing something to eat.

"I know, I'm just excited. I wonder why they're coming back," Zara said.

"We'll find out when they get here," Mel said. She was super excited to see Karone again. She'd all but squealed when Zara told her about the message when they awoke that morning.

"Well, it's a lot more interesting than this holiday everyone is up in arms over," the dark haired said. "It's like it's designed to make people who don't have significant others feel pathetic," she added.

"You pick on things quick," Mel said with a slight smile. "Except you're understating it a bit. You're supposed to feel pathetic if you can't even get a date," she explained. Zara slanted her a sideways glare. Mel giggled. Personally she rather like Valentine's Day, even if she didn't have a date. She saw no harm

in celebrating love. "Oh, there's Kat. Go on in ahead of me. I wanted to ask her something before class started," she said.

"Ok," she said and ducked into the building.

Mel jogged over to Kat who was opening the trunk of her car to get out a few props she wanted everyone to familiarize themselves with. She glanced up when heard someone approach. "Melody," she greeted.

"Need some help?" the younger girl asked.

"That'd be a big help. Thanks," Kat said. They didn't get to say much more as they loaded up with several pairs of fairy wings, crowns and wands. Kat managed to elbow her trunk closed. "Did you want something specific?" she asked as they turned toward the Youth Center.

Mel didn't have a chance to answer. A monster materialized in front of in in a cloud of broken hearts. He was a giant muscular but flabby baby in a dingy, suspiciously saggy diaper. Undersized wings attached to his back missing more feathers than they had. His head was slightly oversized, sitting on his shoulders. His cheeks were blushed pink, two little teeth poked out of his and a blond curl stuck up from his head. His thickly lashed blue eyes sparkled. He was just plain creepy in a disturbing cutesy way.

There was nothing remotely cutesy about the bow with the dual arrows he had trained on them. He released just as they turned. Dark light hit them in the chests and down they went.

On their way to meet the rest of the class, Wood, Tori, Nathan and Chloe didn't really expect to find a monster attacking their friends.

"Hey monster! What do you think you're doing?!" Chloe demanded.

Coopus the anti-Cupid whirled around, drawing more arrows but they dodged aside as he fired. They really shouldn't have been surprised. "Chloe here, there's a monster outside the Youth Center! Kat and Melody are down," she said into her communicator.

Coopus giggled. "You can't stop me, Wangers," he said in a childish voice. More arrows appeared in his bow. "Come out, come out whewever 'oo are," he said.

"You want us? You got us!" Tori said and rotated her wrists making her cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Pterodactyl!"

"Mastodon!"

"Smilodon!"

"Pterodactyl!"

In response, Putties appeared around the monster. "Keep them busy," he ordered.

Putties grouped up and attacked each of the Rangers while Coopus attempted to shoot his arrows.

Kat and Melody began to stir just as reinforcements began to arrive. "What happened?" Kat said thickly. She felt herself to make sure she was ok.

Melody shook her head and got to her feet. They hastily got out of the way of the battle.

Coopus sulked as even more Power Rangers began appearing. The Putties were keeping them away from him, but he wasn't having much luck. "This just isn't worth it," he said. Handfuls of arrows began appearing and he shot skyward in several successive volleys and disappeared in another cloud of broken hearts.

"Take cover!" male Red Ranger shouted as arrows began raining down around him. Most of the Rangers scattered or took cover if they could but two Putties had grabbed male Blue's arms preventing him from throwing up a protective force-field. An arrow hit him. Female Pink wasn't so fortunate either. On the outskirts of battle, Rei was also struck with a stray arrow. The arrow shower stopped and the Putties disappeared.

"Beez, get everyone including Kat and Melody to the medi-lab," male Red ordered. In a flash everyone was gone, either teleporting or being teleported.

-x-

"I'm fine. I really don't feel strange or anything," Melody protested when the read-outs of her medi-bed indicated that it nothing was physically wrong with her, Kat or any of the other Rangers hit with the arrows.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest. "I doubt Zita would send a monster that shot people with ugly arrows that did nothing," he said.

"But it's true that I feel fine, too," Tori interjected. "I just need a little space," she added, jerking her arm away from Wood as he went to help her up from the bed. "Quit hovering. You're smothering me," she told him with a small frown.

Wood gaped at her and held his hands up indicating he wouldn't attempt to help her again. He even backed up a few paces when she made an imperious shooing motion in his direction.

She scoffed at his wounded expression. "Oh, for goodness sake. You're almost eighteen, stop acting like a little kid with hurt feelings and man up a little," she said and pushed some hair behind her shoulder.

"Tori," Wood said, shocked.

"I think I'm beginning to see the effects of the arrows after all," Billy murmured.

Tori gave him a curious look. "What is it?" she asked.

Danny rubbed the bridge of his nose under his glasses. His rational brain was at war with the irrational part and it was giving him a headache. "Don't let Holly in," he managed to say. He finally gave up the fight. "She'd drive me freakin' bonkers," he said and stood up.

"Will this affect them in battle?" Tai asked Billy.

"Physically they're fine. It's their emotions being tampered with. It looks like monster is turning them against the person they care for," Billy explained.

"A monster can't tamper with love like that," Rei objected. "Love shattered the Sword of Darkness. Do you think one of Zita's monsters could really turn love to hate?" she asked.

"No? How do you feel about Sora?" Tai asked her.

"Why would I have any special feelings for Sora? I'm always having to rescue him from being evil and he mopes like a twelve year old girl afterwards. So tiring," she declared dismissively.

Wood sighed. "I'll go tell the others what to expect. Maybe it's best I give Tori a little space right now until we figure this out," he said quietly and left the medi-lab. Part of him understood that it hadn't really been Tori talking like it, but the other part was hurt.

Tai watched him leave and looked at the little group. "Since Rei is in denial, I'll ask Taran and Lammy about it. Until then, the only thing I can think of to do is kill the monster," he said. "Are they okay to leave?" he asked Billy.

"Affirmative," Billy answered.

"Good, I have to get to my class," Kat said. Tori nodded.

"Tai, Zhane and Karone's shuttle landed. They'll be in the Power Chamber imminently," Beez informed them.

"I'm coming," Tai said.

Mel's face lit up. "I'll have to make it later," she told Kat and Tori. The others teleported. The rest of them left the medi-lab.

Tai sighed as he looked around the crowd. "If you don't have a reason to be here, clear out. Everyone is fine-ish. We'll sort it out later," he said.

"What exactly constitutes a reason?" Chloe asked him, raising a brow.

"Don't get cute. Just leave," he told her.

"I can't help being cute. I was born this way," she answered with a grin. "You're lucky I gotta go anyway. Come on ballerinos. Youse two gotta come with me," she said, clutching Nathan and Wood around the arm.

"Don't know if I should go to rehearsal," Wood protested.

"Just don't get in Tori's way and it'll be fine. If she gets out of line, I'll use my BFF prerogative and knock her back in," Chloe assured him.

"It'll be ok," Nathan agreed. Satisfied, Chloe teleported out with the two boys.

Lammy decided to take charge of Rei and Autumn helped while Taran and Win took care of Sora, who was oddly quiet.

A pensive Holly left with Manny while Billie decided to take Danny to the Blue lab to keep him busy.

"I dare you to go all Leader Boy and order me to leave," Rex told Tai.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Tai remarked. Lani snickered. He glanced down at her questioningly.

"Nothing," she said and gave them both a sweet smile. She went over to Zara and Melody. "You guys excited?" she asked.

"Extremely," Melody agreed with a smile. Zara just shrugged but she was just about vibrating.

Jason and Cassie were also waiting for the duo's arrival. "Teleporting Karone and Zhane," Beez announce and in flashes of light, the blond man and obviously pregnant woman arrived. Mel and Zara rushed forward to greet them. Zhane enveloped his sister in a crushing hug. Mel and hugged. Then Cassie came along and squeezed herself into the mix.

Cassie finally turned their attention toward their audience. "Zhane, Karone, this is Jason, Tai, Lani, Rex and I don't know if you've ever met Beta Z in person," she introduced.

"Wow. So you're him," Zhane said as he took Jason's hand in a firm handshake.

"Him?" Jason asked, glancing at Cassie.

"Jason Lee Scott," Zhane said.

"Could almost say the same of Zhane Rahl," Jason said with a smile.

"Think we'll be famous in the future and have people falling all over themselves because you're Tai Stapleton and I'm Rex Hart?" he asked. Tai chuckled.

"Hardly. Your ego needs to deflate a bit," Mel scoffed harshly. "Tai maybe," she added. All eyes fell on her. "What?" she asked, genuinely perplexed.

"Things just got incredibly awkward for some reason, didn't they?" Zhane asked Karone in a low voice.

"I think so," she answered.



Tai cleared his throat. Rex looked down at his sneakers as if they were the most interesting in the world. "Beez still hasn't explained what, exactly you're doing for her," he said, changing the subject back to where it needed to be.

"I asked Zhane to located the three missing Power Coins hidden by Alpha 1," Beez answered.

"We had a few leads," Zhane said. "But someone was stubborn and decided she didn't need to tell me something very important until she couldn't hide it anymore," he said and gave Karone a pointed look.

"I wasn't hiding it from you...exactly. I just thought we'd be more successful than we were and be done before now," she said and crossed her arms over her chest defensively. Zhane draped an arm around her shoulders and squeezed her close. He kissed the top of her head.

"So what now?" Rex asked.

"Well, I hoped to rest for a few days while we get Karone settled then I was going back out there," Zhane answered. "It'll be harder now. Karone was able to go place I couldn't, being a somewhat well known interstellar do-gooder," he said.

"In far reaches, not everyone is aware that Astronema no longer exists," Karone explained.

Jason nodded. "Well if you guys want a place to stay besides a cramped shuttle, I have an extra room at the dojo," he invited.

"Thanks. That would be fantastic," Karone said.

"Thank you. It will be nice to get out of the shuttle for a bit," Zhane agreed.

"I'm so glad you'll be staying here," Mel told Karone. "I'd offer to let you stay with me after Zhane leaves again but cat pee house plus pregnancy is probably not a good combination," she said.

Cassie was shaking her head vehemently. "We'll work something out soon," she vowed. "Come on. Jason and I'll help you get settled in. Then we'll get together for dinner," she said, including the girls in on this.

"Sounds great," Zhane said.

"Before you go," Beez interrupted and made teleport enabled communicators appear around their wrists.

"Thanks," Zhane said.

Taking charge of the small space group, Jason bundled them out of the Command Center.

There was a strange silence once they all left. "You're both staring at me," Rex said without looking at either Tai or Lani to confirm.

"I'm not looking at you," Tai denied while staring at him. "But that had to suck a bit," he said.

Rex chuckled. He had to admit, at least to himself, he'd been curious as to whom Mel liked enough to now hate. It was bit jarring to find him it was him the way he did. "A bit. Anyway, I need to jet. I'm supposed to be taking Rena and her friends to the mall to shop for dresses for the dance tomorrow," he said. He teleported.

Tai sighed and rubbed his forehead. "Does that suck more than I think it does?" Lani asked.

Tai nodded. "I think I'd finally convinced him to ask someone to the dance tomorrow. I was pretty sure it was going to be Melody," he answered. He knew his friend well enough to know when he had more than a passing interest. It was when he watched quietly and didn't flirt outrageously and every given opportunity.

Lani slipped an arm around his waist and rubbed his back. "We'll figure this thing out. You wanted to talk to Taran and Lammy about it right?" she reminded him.

Tai nodded. "I'll send them a message. We can talk later. I gotta go, too. I was in the middle of chores," he said. He kissed her forehead and left. She teleported as well to help Manny console Holly.

-x-

Tommy slipped into the Youth Center. He made his way over to where Kat and a couple of her older students were gathering their props. "Sorry, I'm late," he said.

"You say that like I'm surprised you're late. You're always late or you forgot. I'm getting sick of it. Being an absentminded professor isn't charming," Kat told him and stomped away from him. Tori and Chloe followed her to help her load her car. Chloe shot him an apologetic smile over her shoulder.

Tommy blinked. He frowned. He'd missed something. He glanced at Nathan and Wood.

"Maybe you should let her be, Professor O," Nathan suggested. "I guess you missed everything earlier," he said.

Tommy nodded. "I was out of the country. Please tell me what I missed, boys," he prompted. Wood and Nathan filled him in. Feeling annoyed and frustrated, Tommy left the Youth Center.

Nathan and Wood sat at a table and ordered a couple of shakes from Fox. "If this was a Disney movie, the answer would be simple," Nathan said once they'd been delivered.

"Huh?" Wood asked. He hadn't really been paying attention. His mind was on Tori's behavior. The routine Kat choreographed called for him to work with her and touch her often. She'd complained and insulted him more than once. Telling himself it wasn't really her was wearing thin.

"True love's kiss," Nathan said as if it were obvious.

Wood's head jerked up and he stared at his friend. "Say that again," he said.

Nathan blinked. "I said if this was Disney movie it'd be simple. True love's kiss. Love conquers all," he explained, knowing he wasn't being helpful or anything.

"Nathan you are a genius," Wood said and got to his feet.

"Huh? I am? Can you tell Billie that? Wait. How am I a genius?" he asked.

Wood grinned. "Think about that scar on your shoulder awhile," he said and left the table. He approached where Chloe and Tori were now sipping drinks at the counter. "Tori, we need to talk," he said.

"How many times do I have to tell you to go away before you get the hint?" Tori demanded. She turned her face away from him rolling her eyes.

"I'm borrowing the back room for a bit," Wood told Autumn.

"Okay," Autumn said slowly. She gasped when Wood scooped Tori up in his arms.

"Hey, put me down you cretin!" Tori demanded and tried to wiggle out of his hold. He ignored her and disappeared into the back of the Youth Center with Autumn, Chloe and Nathan gaping after him.

-x-

Lammy watched Tai pace around in her apartment. She always thought her apartment rather roomy even when her brothers were visiting but somehow he made it seem small when he prowled around like that. She sat on her couch beside Taran who was also watching Tai pace. "So you're saying neither of you have any idea?" he finally demanded.

"I'm still learning this kind of thing," Taran said in his defense. "But Rei says this shouldn't be possible," he said.

"Yet it is. I just don't know how Zita is doing it," Lammy said with a sigh.

"But I do agree with Rei that it shouldn't be possible," Taran added.

"Then why is it happening? In the past few hours the monster has appeared all over the city firing his arrows and generally making people miserable," Tai said in an exasperated burst.

"I don't know. I wish Rei could apply herself to this problem but it's like she doesn't even realize there is a problem. It's kind of like she doesn't even remember having feelings for Sora," Taran said.

"Which is ridiculous since it was her feelings for Sora that separated her from Zita," Lammy said.

"You say that so easily yet you think Rex's plan to destroy the Sword of Darkness using Billie's feelings for Nathan a lucky accident," Taran drawled.

Tai stared at them. "It can't be that easy," he said, shaking his head.

"What can't be that easy?" Lammy asked.

"Nevermind. It's not possible. I mean, there's no guarantee that it goes both ways," he said, shaking his head again.

"Will you make sense," Lammy sighed. She usually had nothing but respect for Tai but right now she felt like strangling him.

"I think I get it, but you're right, there's no guarantee it goes both ways," he said.

"But it does, so far. Mostly," Tai said. "Destroying this monster may help everyone else but I think we might be able to salvage the team in order to defeat the monster," he said.

"How do we test it?" Taran asked.

"Let's get Sora over here," Tai said. "If it works, then we'll have a fully functional Rei working on the problem," he said.

"What are you two talking about?" Lammy demanded.

Taran grinned at her. "Love, sister. Love," he answered.

-x-

"Put me down you bush headed Neanderthal!" Tori commanded of Wood and hit his shoulders with her fists. "I've never been so humiliated in my life. You're going to regret this!" she yelled when he suddenly set her on her feet. She glared at him realizing where they were. "Whatever it is you're planning, you'd better forget about it," she said and tried to leave.

Wood moved in front of the door and shook his head. "You're the one who told me to man up," he said and pinned her with a dark eyed stared.

Her chin jutted up, not really having an answer for that. "You know I can put you down if you don't let me out of here. I have the skills," she warned him.

"Then why haven't you? You have the skills," he agreed. "You probably could easily gotten out of my hold. So why didn't you?" he asked.

Tori glared at him, gritting her teeth. "Let me leave," she seethed.

"Not until you hear what I have to say," he said.

"Say it and don't let me see your face again unless absolutely necessary," she said.

"I love you," he stated.

"I know. You're a hover-y, smothery, stalker boy with a crush. I get it. Now let me leave," she said.

Wood shook his head. He stepped up to her. He cupped her face in his hands. She tried to jerk away but he wouldn't let her. She glared again but he looked her steadily in the eyes. "I love you," he said again in a quieter voice and dipped his head to kiss her. She put her hands against his chest fully intending to push him away. She fisted her hands in his shirt instead, pulling at him to get closer, kissing him back with everything that was in her.

He pulled back and looked at her. "I love you, too, Wood. I'm sorry," she whispered, a tear trailing down her cheek.

"Nothing to be sorry for," he said and brushed the tear away with his thumb.

Smiling madly, Tori threw her arms around him and kissed him again. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her tight against him. Telling the others he had Tori back could wait awhile.

-x-

Sora looked at Tai as if he'd suddenly grown two heads. He looked at Lammy and Taran then back at Tai. "You want me to do what now?" he asked. He'd been called to Lammy's apartment and popped over immediately only to be faced with Tai and Taran's idea for a solution.

"Tell her how you feel about her," Taran said. "Make it clear," he said.

Sora scratched a hand through his hair. "You're all making some really big assumptions here," he said faintly.

Lammy crossed her arms over her chest and walked up to him. "We need Rei to be okay in case defeating the monster doesn't solve the problem. So are you saying our really big assumptions are wrong?" she asked.

Sora threw his arms up. He paced away from her. "That's not what I'm saying," he said. "I'm saying Zita is really starting to tick me off," he declared. "I'm going to find Rei," he said and left the apartment. He'd get to the Youth Center the old fashioned way; on his own two feet. He'd use the time to think things over.

-x-

Nathan had moved to the bar to sit with Chloe as they waited to see what was going to happen next. Fox lounged against the counter nearby, taking a break and drinking a cup of hot tea. "They've been back there awhile," he remarked. "Do I need to get the hose?" he asked.

Chloe made a face in his direction. "Geeze, do you live in the gutter?" she asked.

"What? It's a valid question," Fox pointed out with a slight grin. "They might be cute as puppies but they're still teenagers," he said.

Nathan rubbed his shoulder. "He has a point, especially if Wood fixed her," he said.

"Yeah, I'm getting the hose," Fox declared.

Autumn reached over the counter and smacked him upside the head. "Sit down and behave," she scolded him. Chloe brightened. She reached out and smacked him in the arm.

"Ow. What was that for?" Fox complained.

"Looked like fun when Autumn did it," Chloe answered.

Fox rubbed his arm. "No, wonder Danny needs force-fields with you as a sister," he grumbled. "Oh-ho. Now what?" he said when a very determined Sora swept into the Youth Center. "Never boring around you people," he remarked.

"The only thing that would make it better if you were a Ranger, too, right?" Chloe said.

"For such a cute little thing, you have sharp teeth," Fox told her grumpily.

"Stop being so mean to Fox," Nathan said though he was trying not to laugh.

"Autumn, is Rei upstairs?" Sora asked.

"You sure you want to go up there?" Autumn asked. "She's not exactly you're biggest fan right now," she said.

Sora shook his head. "Ask Taran about it next time you see him," he muttered and headed up to the living level of the building. He knocked on the door of Rei's room.

"Come in," she called. She looked up from the manga she was reading when Sora walked in. She scrunched up her nose. "Oh, it's you," she said and lifted the book again. "You can leave now. Sailor Moon is about to start crying in the middle of a battle," she said

"Sailor Moon cries in the middle of every battle," Sora stated and pushed the book down. He realized this was actually the first time he'd been in Rei's room. It looked a lot like his little sister's room on Terra Venture with a profusion of manga on every shelf, cute stuffed characters scattered around, figurines, and posters on the walls. Except for the bits that looked like they belonged in some occult shop. Crystals, candles, herbs in various stages of drying, what he strongly suspected was a shelf solely dedicated to magic books and of course her staff was prominently mounted on wall amidst the anime posters. It suited her perfectly.

Rei pursed her lips and glared at him. "I have only so much patience," she said in a prim clipped voice.

Sora sighed. "They say actions speak louder than words," he said. He reached out and drew her out of the comfy arm chair she'd been curled up in. Before she could tell him to go away again, he kissed her.

Rei's eyes went wide on a gasp but then she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him back happily. She giggled. "I told Tai Zita couldn't actually manipulate love," she murmured.

Sora rested his forehead against hers. "I just wish I could've sorted m'self out for m'self. Your sister is gettin' bloody aggravatin'," he grumbled.

Rei just grinned. Maybe she owed her sister a little thanks for stepping things up a bit. "Now that I think I know what she did, I'll be able to tell Tai that defeating the monster will definitely negate his effects. But, later. I think I like kissing more than saving the world," she said and leaned up to kiss him again. Sora thought maybe he agreed.

-x-

Final preparations for the Valentine's Day show and dance were on their way even early in the morning. Holly sipped coffee with Manny and Lani. "Maybe I should give it a try, too," she said suddenly.

Manny glanced her. "I didn't think things had gotten to that point for you guys," she said.

Lani tilted her head thoughtfully. "Maybe that doesn't matter," she said. "Rei says the monster's powers were just a superficial manipulation. It probably doesn't have to be the big L. I say go for it. Remind Danny that he likes you," she prompted. "We just need a way to pin him down. He keeps appearing and disappearing before we can even get there," she grumbled.

Holly smiled. "Maybe I will. Then maybe we can work on an idea for making sure that creepy kewpie hangs around long enough to blow him up," she said, a determined look on her face.

"Note to self, don't get between Holly and her man," Manny said. Lani snickered.

Holly shrugged.

"We'd better get to school. You'll have plenty of opportunity there," Lani said as she finished her coffee.

"Lord help that boy," Manny agreed. Holly scrunched her nose then grinned.

The trio left the Youth Center and went to school. Holly scanned the hallway near Danny's locker. She spotted him just closing it. "Hey, you," she said, determination setting her chin. This was easier than making him ask her out. After all they'd been dating for awhile now and it was hardly their first kiss.

Danny glanced at her and irritation flashed over his face. "Yo. Make it snappy," he said, stuffing his hands in his pockets and waiting impatiently.

"Bend down a little. You're extremely tall," she said.

Danny rolled his eyes and bent down. Holly flashed a triumphant grin and leaned in and kissed him. She stepped back and waited.

"PDA's are against school rules," Danny stated. When Holly pouted, thinking it hadn't worked, he snuck another kiss. "See ya in Chem," he said and walked around her.

Holly was beaming when Lani and Manny joined her. "It worked!" she said.

Lani nodded. "Figured. Now we just need to kill the monster."

-x-

### **Palace on the Moon**

Moriko fluttered around the grand hall of the palace, directing Putties as they put up the final decorations. "Higher!" she shouted at one putting up a blood red heart shaped disco ball.

Zita scoffed as she wandered in, looking at the decorations. "This looks less like a ballroom and more like a high school gymnasium," she said.

"Like you've ever been to a high school dance. Besides, that was the look I was going for. Cheesy and fun," Mori said and blew a bit of hair out of her face. "Sure you don't want to come?" she asked.

Zita shot her a baleful glance in response. "I'm going to see how my monster is wrecking this stupid holiday," she said and stalked out of the room.

Moriko shrugged and went back to ordering Putties around.

-x-

During and after school, Billie, Danny and Holly put their heads together to figure out a way to trap the monster in one place long enough to fight it. Throughout most of the day, both at the high school and the university, otherwise happy couples were fighting for no definable reason. It was like a hormone driven battle ground.

Tai paced the Command Center, rubbing his head. "If I have to hear one more screaming couple fight, I'm going to storm the moon," he declared. "Any ideas on how to contain this misbegotten monster?" he demanded. "Science stuff? Magic stuff? I open to any suggestions," he said.

"Actually, it might take both," Lammy said. "Billie, you've been analyzing the monster every time he appears, right?" she asked.

Billie nodded. "Of course," she answered.

"Do you know the harmonic frequency when he teleports in and out?" she asked.

"Harmonic frequency?" Tai asked blankly. Science wasn't his strong suit.

"The sub-sonic frequency he vibrates at to pass through the barriers of space and time," Billie said. "I do have the frequency. What are you thinking?" she asked.

"Crystals placed around the monster next time he appears that vibrate at a frequency that will cancel it out. He won't be able to teleport anymore and he'll have to stay and fight," Lammy answered.



"Ohh. I want to do the crystals. I owe him," Rei volunteered with a fierce glint in her eye.

"Right then. If we have a plan, let's get to it," Tai said.

"That's right. No squabbling couples messing up Tai's first Valentine's date because of a monster," Chloe quipped.

"Sharp teeth," Fox hissed.

Tai cleared his throat, his ears turning red. "Leave. If you can't help with this crystal plan, leave now," he said.

"Come on partner before you really get yourself into trouble," Rex said and draped an arm over her shoulder, but he was trying not to laugh.

As ordered, if they couldn't help with the crystal project, the others left. After all, there was a show and a dance to prepare for. They were just hoping they'd be able to enjoy it.

-x-

While waiting on word that the crystals were ready, Rex was helping Tai give Fort T-Rex a quick clean. Tai wanted to bring Lani around later and give her something special for Valentine's Day. "Something on your mind?" Tai asked because Rex had been a little too quiet.

Rex was sorting through their old dinosaur collection and weeding out the broken ones and preparing to donate the others. He idly played with the articulated trunk of the mastodon. "So I was talking to the Phantom Ranger--"

"You mean Jason?"

Rex snickered. "Yeah, him. I asked about any after effects wearing the suit may have had," he began. "Basically asking him why I don't connect with this guy anymore," he said and held up the little mammoth.

Tai nodded. "So that's what's been bugging you, lately. You thinking about quitting?" he asked. He didn't think that was right. Rex wouldn't bail on them.

"I won't leave you guys hanging. I have my replacement all picked out. I just need you to finish training him with the dual swords. Now that Karone's here, she's agreed to take over teaching Hei Kwan Kung Fu," he said and put the little mammoth in the box and went on to a different collection of toys.

Tai frowned. "You make it sound as though you're leaving," he said. That actually made a little more sense.

"I'm going to help Zhane. I've talked to the school already. I have enough credits to graduate. I've already taken all the tests I need to get into AGU. I just need to finish up some paperwork and they'll

mail my diploma to my parents," he said.

Tai nodded. "What do they think you're doing?" he asked.

"Work study," Rex answered. "I have to be back by the start of the fall term but Zhane didn't think that would be a problem," he said.

"Chloe will kill you when she finds out," Tai pointed out.

"That's why I'll be on the other side of the Power Chamber when I break the news," Rex said.

"Won't be the same without you," Tai said.

"It'll be ok, though. You got your lady. I think I need this. Something about it feels right," Rex said and smiled. He went back to sorting through the toys. "Okay, who marked on my Raphael?" he demanded.

"That was *my* Raphael and your sister tried to make him pretty," Tai answered.

"No. The Mikey and the Leo were yours. The Raph and Donny were mine and the Rat would never dare mark on my toys," Rex denied. Cleaning and changes forgotten as the two bickered about the graffiti'd action figure.

-X-

Coopus had been having a grand time disrupting peaceful relationships all over Angel Grove and staying one step ahead of the Power Rangers. They hadn't arrived at all during his last few appearances. That perhaps made him slightly cocky next time he appeared in the park where they were showing old romantic movies outside. Couples with picnic baskets sat on blankets. Some were watching the movie, some were not.

"Ooh. This looks like fun!" he said happily. He lifted his bow and several arrows. He let them fly as panicked people began to scurry away. He giggled and fired a few more arrows just because it was so fun. "Miss Twiss Zita will be so happy, happy," he chortled and even skipped around. He fired a few more arrows and began to leave in a cloud of broken hearts.

Nothing happened. He whined as he tried again. "Hey, what's goin' on here?" he said in frustration.

"You're trapped," the male Red Ranger said as he and the other Rangers began appearing around him in the park. "No more hide and seek. This time you're finished," he said.

"No, no, no Wangers. Putties!" Coopus called. When the hench-creatures began appearing, Coopus pulled back on his bow string, arrows appearing in his grip.

"Nope! We're not going through all that again," male Pink said as he hovered nearby. He shot an arrow from the Power Bow and made Coopus lose his grip on his bow.

"That wasn't very nice," Coopus said.

"Try it again and I'll show you nice," male Pink warned then began to lay down cover fire for he rest of the team.

Female Pink summoned her Power Fans. She alternated between opening the fans and slashing through the Putties and closing them and using them like clubs. She opened her fans and deflected a few of the arrows Coopus managed to send out. "Uh-uh. That ain't happening no more," she said.

"You're darn right," male Yellow agreed. He jumped over a Putty and brought his Power Daggers stabbing down into the monster.

Coopus shrieked and stomped his foot. He turned bringing up his bow. He let an arrow fly. It landed in the ground and exploded. Male Yellow had already jumped clear.

"Not just a one trick pony," female Yellow said as she dodged another exploding arrow. She used her Power Grips to fend off the Putties trying to get her to trip up.

Female Black used her Power Axe to knock one of the arrows aside. It exploded on impact and send her flying through the air. Male Black caught her and they both crashed into the ground. "Oomph. Thanks," she said.

"No problem," he said as they sprang back to their feet. He spun his Power Scythe and slashed through a few Putties. "Just don't do that again," he told her.

"That's my little sista for youse," male Blue said dryly. He bit back a curse and hastily threw up a force-field as another arrow exploded, protecting himself, female Blue and the Black Team. "Yeh, we gotta do somethin' bout that. Any ideas, Glitch?" he asked as he took out a few Putties with his Power Lance.

"I'm working on it," she said snappishly. A Power Sai went flying over his head and knocked into another arrow sent flying. It denoted above their heads.

Male Blue whistled. "I hope your Sai went back to the Grid," he said when there was no sign of it afterwards.

Female Blue let out a little growl of frustration. "Just blast the fudger with the Magnum Cannon!" she said irritably.

Male Green had summoned his Armor and defended himself against the Putties with the Stygian Blade. Female Green was at his back as usual. An arrow exploded nearby. "That one was close," she gasped. She jabbed a Putty in the Z.

Male Green stabbed another. "He's destroying the park. Am I wrong to be glad we aren't closer to the Youth Center?" he asked.

"Sounds like a fine sentiment to me," Electrum assured him as she fenced with a Putty, smacking him in several places with her Rapier before just kicking him in the Z and sending him flying.

Silver had split apart but he came back together and gripped his Sword. He used the huge blade and batted a Putty into the next arrow that was loosed. "Now if only I could do that every time. Watch out!"

Gold had to spin away from the Putties he was fighting and held up his mace as an arrow hit. The impact made him skid back slightly. "He's getting entirely too comfortable shooting those arrows. He said. He spun around and tossed his mace like a shot put. Seeing the weapon coming, Coopus fired an arrow. The Mace was a distraction. Gold came through the explosion and just punched him right in the ugly pudgy cherubic face.

Rei wasn't far away from the battle, making sure the crystals that had been teleported as soon as the monster had appeared in the park were consistent with the harmonic frequency holding the monster captive.

"Should have known you had something to do with this," Zita hissed when she spotted her sister. She'd decided to investigate when she realized the monster was no longer able to teleport.

Rei turned toward the voice. She smiled thinly. "Of course. It's my duty to help the Rangers," she said. "Though I am a little ambiguous about this monster. One the one hand, he tried to mess with my emotions. On the other, because of that my relationship with Sora has never been stronger," she said, smiling brightly.

Zita snarled. She launched herself at the other girl. Rei shrieked and struck out as well. They grabbed clumps of hair, kicked, bit and scratched at each other and called each other names ending in an undignified scuffle on the ground.

The Red Rangers had been handling the Putties but the whole exploding arrows thing was getting out of hand. "Ready to try your new and improved Armor?" he asked her.

She nodded firmly. "Can't hardly wait," she agreed.

"Rex. Cannon," he stated.

"Ready," male Black assured.

The two of them crossed their wrists over their chests. "Power Armor!" Red digital matrices briefly formed over their upper bodies as red and golden armor appeared. The digital matrices formed over their left forearms as golden gauntlets formed. Small red jewels appeared near their wrists. Power Sword and Tyranno Sword in hand, the Red Rangers ran at the monster, slashing through Putties.

Coopus saw them coming and attempted to fire arrows at them but every time he did, dinosaur faced shields were thrown up.

"Magnum Power Cannon!"

"Now!" male Red said. He put on a burst of strength. Female would marvel at the feeling of the burst of strength that swept over her as they slashed into each side of the monster, throwing up massive sparks

as he shrieked. They spun out of the way.

"Magnum Blast!" male Black pulled the trigger of the Cannon. The individual points of energy converged as they blasted through the monster. He exploded in a deluge of broken hearts that coalesced into a giant monster.

"Ooh, now I'm weally weally big," Coopus cooed and pulled back on a bow, aiming at a building.

The crystal on male Red's gauntlet began to glow. "Magnum Alpha Megazord!"

From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. Their pilots were teleported into an enormous combined cockpit except that Silver had split into three again and only one of him was teleported.

The crystal on female Red's gauntlet glowed. "Alphamax Cannon!"

The Alphamax Cannon appeared beside the Magna Alpha Megazord. Those who weren't teleported to the Megazord were teleported into the Cannon except the extraneous Silver Rangers.

Coopus loosed his arrow but The Megazord's tail knocked it aside. It detonated, rocking them but causing no true harm to the building. "This the end. I'm saving Valentine's Day," male Red grumbled. "Magnum Dino Blast!" He lined the target up on his screen. He pressed the buttons, the dino mouths come open and their tail whipped up and four points of energy where fired at the monster. His bow exploded.

"No! You awe all weally, weally mean!" Coopus cried.

"I'll show you mean," female Red said coolly. She approached the center console in the cannon. She grabbed the dual joysticks and targeted the monster. "Target Acquired. Firing!" She depressed the buttons. Two by two, from the outside in the points of the Alphamax Cannon began firing, hitting the monster in succession. Each hit glowed. Finally the middle barrel fired. A beam of blindingly bright light hit. The other ten points connected in a circle.

Both blasts combined into one awesomely devastating blast that had him exploding into broken hearts that dissipated into nothing.

"Talk about two people meant to be together," female Black whispered to female Pink inside the Cannon, referring to the Red Team. Pink had to snicker at that.

On the ground, the two Silver Rnagers that weren't in the Megazord had spotted the scuffling Repulsa sisters and ran over to them. Each of him, grabbed one, pulling them apart. "Let me go, Sora! Let me at her," Rei said, struggling hard to get to Zita again.

"Get your hands off me you trifected freak!" Zita snarled and struggled just as hard.

"Not happening," both of him said in response to both of the girls.

Rei huffed and stopped struggling. She pouted and glared at Zita.

Zita glared back. She stomped her Silver's foot. He yelped and loosened his grip. "This isn't over," she hissed and disappeared in a cloud of gray smoke.

Rei blew hair out of her face. "It never seems to be," she said. "Ok, Sora. Get yourself together," she said and patted his arm.

He let her go and both of him popped out of existence as he unified again. The battle was over after all.

-X-

### **Palace on the Moon**

Moriko's guests for the ball were just beginning to arrive when Zita returned. She took one look at her sister's mussed appearance and sighed. There was only one reason she'd look like that. "Were you fighting with Rei again?" she demanded.

Zita scowled and took in her sister's sexy blood red gown and rolled her eyes. "Go to your ball and don't mind my affairs," she said and tried to smooth her now lopsided and falling out hair.

Moriko rolled her eyes. "You're always welcome to drop in," she said, deciding to drop the subject.

"I'd rather visit mother," she said, demonstrating how distasteful she found the very concept of Moriko's ball.

"If only you would," Moriko murmured. She gave a dainty shrug and walked away. In his blood red tuxedo, Griff stood nearby. She grinned up at him and wrapped her arm around his when he offered.

They made Zita sick just looking at them. Gagging, she turned away and went to her room.

-X-

The Valentine's show at the Youth Center went off without a hitch. The ballet scene was well received and Kat and Dr. O seemed to be more than old friends. The effects of the anti-love arrows had immediately diminished when the monster was defeated and love was definitely in the air as the dance got underway.

Although he was DJ'ing, Wood managed to find time to dance with his Tori and she couldn't be happier. Danny and Holly, too, were having a great time. Even squabbling with her sister earlier couldn't diminish Rei's great mood as she hung out with Sora, feeling closer to him than she ever had before.

Melody was flushed when a fast paced song ended. She'd been dancing in a girl group with Zara and

Chloe, just having fun but she'd definitely worked up a thirst. She hesitated slightly when she spotted Rex grabbing a cup of punch himself. He glanced at her. "I don't bite you know," he said and gave her a smile.

She smiled back. "I, um, well," she closed her eyes and shook her head. "I don't know," she whispered and peeked at him.

Rex chuckled. He reached out and wrapped her hands around the punch. They were warm and she blushed. She hoped the fact that she was already flushed from dancing hid it. "I'm flattered, but the timing isn't right," he said quietly. She tilted her head and looked at him curiously. He shook his head. "But there's no reason not to dance. Join me when you finish your punch," he said and flashed her a smile.

"Who needs punch?" Mel said and discarded the full cup. Rex chuckled again and took her hand, bringing her back to the dance floor. He wasn't gone yet and a little innocent fun would be the best way to spend his time before he did leave.

-x-

A week later the Rangers and non-Rangers alike assembled in the Command Center to see off Zhane and his new traveling companion. Rex had actually taken the time to tell Chloe privately that he was leaving since it wouldn't be fair to her to spring it on her all of a sudden.

She was scowling at him now. "I still don't understand why you're leaving. We're Team Awesome," she stated mulishly.

Rex smiled thinly. He twisted his wrists and made his cuffs appear. He popped his Power Coin out of his left cuff. They disappeared instantly. "Now there gets to be a new Team Awesome and I expect you to have made him one of the best Power Rangers that ever was," he said.

Chloe gasped. "No. You can't," she said and she glared at Fox.

Fox blinked. "Why are you staring at me?" he demanded.

"The reason I specifically asked you be here," Rex said and approached the younger boy. He dropped the Power Coin in his hand.

Metallic black cuffs instantly formed around Fox's wrists. He suddenly felt faint as he stared at him.

"All right. Welcome to the team," Wood said with a big grin and slapped him on the back. Fox almost toppled over, still stunned. There was a ripple of welcomes and congratulations that he didn't even register.

Zhane cleared his throat. "We'd better go," he said.

Rex nodded. "See you all soon," he said. There was another murmur of goodbyes and even a few tears. Beta Z teleported them out of Command Center and soon they left the Earth as well.

x-End Chapter 19-x



## 20 - Begin to Revile

### Palace on the Moon

Zita, Moriko and Griff were having a leisurely breakfast in quiet morning when Uncle Rito ran in. They blinked. They hadn't seen much of the old bones lately. He seemed strangely in a panic. "Run for your lives, kiddies!" he exclaimed.

Zita and Moriko got to their feet. "Uncle Rito, what on Luna is wrong? Here sit," Zita ushered him into a chair at the table.

"Let me pour you some tea," Moriko said and poured him a piping hot cup.

Rito shook his head and pushed the tea away. "No, no, no. Tea isn't going to help this. I'm getting out of here. You're old enough to make your own decisions but it'd ease my mind if you all left, too. Let Widow and Roki deal with it if they manage to make it back," he said and he was so full of nervous energy his bones rattled together.

"Deal with what?" Zita asked.

"My baby sister is coming," Rito whispered.

Moriko dropped the tea kettle. It was only Griff's sharp reflexes, pulling her away that stopped her from being seriously scalded. "I take it, that's not good," he said.

"No, siree bobcat," Rito shook his head vehemently.

Zita pursed her lips. "If your pea sized brain is capable, imagine my mother before the Wave that changed her into what she is today. Now add spoiled rotten baby of the family," she said sharply.

"My pea sized brain is doing a fairly good job of imagining an older you," Griff said and gave her a humorless grin. It resembled more of teeth-baring snarl.

Moriko sighed. Maybe one day these two would get along. Maybe. One day. "When is she due to arrive, Uncle Rito?" she asked.

"Today! That's why I'm out of here, dearies," Rito said and stood up. He dropped a bony arm around Zita's shoulder and squeezed her close. "You're always welcome to stay with me," he assured her. "You two, too," he assured Moriko and Griff.

"Thank you, Uncle Rito," Zita said.

Moriko smiled. "Yes, thank you," she echoed.

"I refuse to be run out of my own home by uninvited guests," Zita said.

"If Zita's staying, so will I," Moriko said and shrugged. If Ria Revile was every bit as nasty as rumors said, it might be the push Zita needed to begin to open herself to their destiny.

"Suits yourselves. I'm out," Rito said. He stood and gave each of them a hug, scooping Moriko and Griff up as one. He trotted out of the dining room.

Moriko sighed. She waved an arm and the mess she made disappeared. "The question is, why is Ria Revile coming here? I thought she was working on conquering all of Andromeda," she said.

"I suppose we'll find out once she gets here," Zita answered. "I meant what I said. I won't be chased out of here," she said and stalked out of the dining room.

Moriko was frowning. "I don't think any of this is good. I need to warn Rei. Staying or going?" she asked.

"I'll drop by Lammy's," Griff said. Mori nodded and the two of them disappeared.

-X-

Fox had never been to Tai's house before he took over training him. Fox had been the victim of not understanding when Rex had said he was better at the dual sword technique than Tai. He should really know better by now that when either of them says something like that, the margin of error was a sliver that normal people wouldn't even notice. Just because Tai admitted that Rex was better at the technique than he was did not mean he wasn't good at it.

And as a teacher, Tai was much more focused and patient. It was somehow worse than Rex's approach of laughing at him, rolling his eyes, or telling him everything he was doing wrong. Tai was relentless with drills and broke everything down so even a monkey could get it. At least Rex had assumed Fox was smarter than a monkey.

Or, maybe he was just cranky from doing drills for three hours in the training area behind the house and his arms felt like they were about to fall off. He fell over backwards and stared up at the sky.

Grandpa shook his head. "*Not sure this one would make a samurai, grandson,*" he remarked. Fox wrinkled his nose. The old man was always supervising the sessions.

Tai cocked his head. "*Maybe not but that's not really our goal,*" he answered. "*Did you finish the blades?*" he asked.

Grandpa nodded. "*They are ready. Him, I am not so sure about,*" he said.

"If you're going to talk about me, at least do it in English," Fox complained as he sat up. He rolled his shoulders. "Wait. What blades?" he asked.

"Who said anything about blades?" Tai asked blandly. He didn't bother to explain that Grandpa refused to speak English.

Fox narrowed his eyes. "You and your tropical vomit granddad," he said and got to his feet.

Tai raised an eyebrow then glanced at his grandfather. Tropical vomit was definitely an accurate description of his fashion sense. "Since when do you speak Japanese?" he asked though he'd began to suspect from day one that Fox was following everything he and Grandpa were saying.

Fox shrugged. "I dunno. Watched a lot of anime as a kid I guess," he said and got to his feet, stretching. "I need hot water and lots of it," he grumbled.

*"I've never heard anyone complain so much,"* Grandpa grumbled. *"Come in the house for tea. Both of you,"* he said and went to the house.

"Come on. You were raised in England, right? Tea cures all ills," Tai said. Fox snorted but didn't argue as he followed Tai inside.

-x-

Lani sat on a park bench waiting for Tai. She absently played with the little red-jeweled fairy pendent he'd given her for Valentine's Day. She supposed it was a way of putting that whole Dark Tai thing behind them. She scuffed her red sneakered foot against the ground and checked her watch. She knew that he had training with Fox, but Tai was nothing if not punctual. She was just early.

"That is simply adorable. Did your boyfriend give that to you?" a voice to her left startled her. Years of training and her recent experiences as a Power Ranger made her pretty aware of her surroundings. The fact that there was a girl suddenly sitting next to her when there hadn't been one there before instantly set her on high alert.

The girl was pretty innocuous looking. A little older than Lani, she was a cute Asian featured girl with large dark eyes. Her hair was lavender and pulled into curly pigtails. She wore a panda hoodie and large red glasses. Something about her seemed familiar to Lani but she couldn't put her finger on it. The girl was looking at her expectantly.

"Er, yes," Lani finally answered. "He gave it to me for Valentine's Day," she said and wrapped her hand around the pendent as if afraid the girl would snatch it if she didn't hold on to it.

If it were possible the girl's eyes widened even more. "So lucky," she gushed. She frowned slightly, "Someone in a shiny red suit killed my last boyfriend. I was very unamused," she said and her eyes narrowed to dangerous slits. "In fact, I think I'm highly jealous of you right now," she declared and stood up.

Thanking her creator that her instincts didn't let her down, Lani launched herself over the back of the bench a split second before a magical blast blew it apart. Lani twisted her wrists as she stood. "Don't take your romantic problems out on me. Who are you anyway?" she demanded.

The other girl's lips twisted cruelly. "Oh, little Earth girl. I'm something your puny mind couldn't handle," she said.

"Oh, yeah? Try me. You might be surprised," Lani prompted.

"You asked for it," she said. She winked and a smoky puff of magic changed her. Gone were the ridiculous glasses and panda hoodie. She now wore a military style hat and a military style overcoat over a black leotard. She wore tall boots and yellow-lensed cat-glasses. "I'm Rio Revile and my mother and I are going to crush this puny planet under our boot heels. I'll start with you," she said almost playfully.

Lani nodded. "There's just one problem with that," she said in a comparative tone.

Rio raised an eyebrow. "Oh? What would that be?" she asked.

"I wear a shiny red suit and I'm going to stop you," Lani announced. "It's Morphin' time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex!"

-x-

## **Command Center**

Beta Z was reading the first report sent to her by Rex and Zhane when the alarms went off. "Ay yi yi!" she exclaimed and a viewer lit up. Showing the female Red Ranger facing the unknown stranger.

"What's the racket?" Danny asked as he popped out of the Blue Lab.

"Lani activated her distress beacon," Beez answered. "Lani is being attacked in the park by someone we don't know," she said on the open communicator channel.

"Another brilliant idea thought up by our resident evil genius," Danny murmured to himself. He made a mental note not to call Billie an evil genius to her face. She'd probably not react well even though he was joking.

"I'm on it, Beez. I'll grab Fox. You get Tori, Manny, Danny and Autumn. Have everyone else on stand-by," Tai said in answer.

"That's my cue," Danny declared. "Keep Holly workin' on our project," he said. He twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' time! Triceratops!"

-x-

Rio faced down the female Red Ranger, eyeing her over the top of her yellow lenses. She smirked. "Good luck with that," she said and threw down a handful of what looked for a moment like turtle eggs. They burst open on impact and formed sleek, menacing, dark figures with skeletal details wielding scythes. "Bone Drones! Attack!" she ordered.

"Power Sword!" female Red managed to summon the weapon just as the creatures attacked. She deflected their attacks, but there was a lot of them and they didn't conveniently disintegrate like the Putties.

Red, Blue, Black, Pink, Yellow and Green laser blasts gave her some breathing room just as they were about to overwhelm her. "Phew," she blew out.

Male Red, the new male Black, the female Pink, female Yellow and female Green Rangers fanned out behind her, holding their blasters. "Who's your new friend?" male Red asked as he holstered his blaster.

"Wow," Black remarked, "She's well fit, ain't she?"

"It's like Rex never left," Blue said drily.

"Just learned British slang," Yellow agreed.

Green shook her head and Pink rolled her eyes.

Rio gave a curt bow. "Rio Revile, your new Overlady," she introduced herself sweetly. She held up her hand toward the sky in a gun pose. An actual laser blaster with shiny silver plating appeared. She pointed at them and began firing. Hundreds of pink-purple energy pellets bombarded them. Even Blue's force-field barely held under the onslaught.

She blew on the smoking barrel as the now morph-less Rangers got to their feet.

"Less than brilliant first performance. No one tell Rex," Fox complained as he got to his feet.

Danny didn't have the will to make a remark as he rubbed his aching arms. They felt like jelly.

Tai checked on Lani, helping her to her feet. She glared at the new villainess in town.

Rio's brows went up. "Oh, is that him?" she purred and approached the couple. She circled around them, looking Tai over appreciatively. "Hmm. I think when we conquer this planet, I'll keep him," she declared.

"Ew," Tori said. "Hey, lady, you made a boo-boo," she said with a sniff.

"A boo-boo? What are you? Five?" Rio scoffed and sneered at Tori.

"No. She's our cute little Tori. She's also right. You majorly miscalculated somethin'," Danny said, his wit coming back with the feeling in his arms.

"Oh? How so? I have you Power Rangers defenseless in front of me, surrounded by Bone Drones. In what way have I made a -- ahem-- boo-boo?" she asked.

"You miscounted," Autumn said quietly. She was staring at Rio curiously. There was something about her aura. Decidedly evil, yes, but familiar.

Rio closed her eyes and rubbed the bridge of her nose. "I think I'm getting a migraine. Stop speaking in riddles!"

"She said you miscounted. It's not a riddle. Look," Fox said. He pointed at himself. "One," at Tai and Lani, "two, three," at Danny, and Manny, "four, five," at Tori and Autumn, "six, seven," a grin widening on his face, he pointed over her shoulder, "eight, nine, ten...well, you get my point," he said.

Rio whirled around. The rest of the Power Rangers had appeared. "What? What is this?" she demanded.

"Didn't think it was kind of strange that there were two Red Rangers? This is Angel Grove, chica," Manny said.

"That's right. Whatever you and Aunt Ria are up to, Rio, we won't make it easy on you," Rei said as she pushed Silver aside to let her pass. Dressed for practicing magic with her ornate staff in hand, she almost looked imposing.

"That explains it," Autumn and Lani said at almost the same time.

Rio pushed her glasses up her nose. "Thanks for the warning. We'll take it to heart,coz," she sneered Rei's way. She and the Bone Drones disappeared in puffs of smoke.

Rei sighed when she saw the way Tai was looking at her. She held up her hands, her staff standing on it's own as she did so. "I know. I know, 'Rei, you got some 'splaining to do'," she said.

Electrum put a hand on her shoulder. "I'll help. We go should go though," she said.

Tai nodded. "Yes. To the Youth Center," he said and the group teleported.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Loud footsteps clacked through the Palace. Even the Putty Patrollers kept around as servants were eerily quiet. Zita waited patiently for the grand entrance. She didn't wait long. "Ah, there you are, girl," Ria Revile said in a loud, obnoxious sort of voice. It was so like her mother's that it was jarring. A tall imposing woman in a black body suit, a wide silver belt, a purple lined cape, and tall boots and gloves embellished with bone-like designs stood in the archway of the throne room. She wore a headdress what had a large star-like shape over her head with black- and white-striped antler-like shapes jutting out from either side.

"Aunt Ria, how interesting to see you so far from home," Zita said. She tried not to grimace at being called 'girl' as if she were a mere child.

Ria waved a dismissive hand as she surveyed the throne room with obvious distaste. "It looks like a Rachnaemance threw up in here," she complained. There was a loud clang in the corridor beyond. She whirled around. "Careful with the Hatchery!" she screeched at someone she couldn't see. "Put it in there with the little rat-faced man," she ordered.

At this Zita sprang into action and pushed past the older woman. Several Bone Drones were carrying

equipment. "Don't go anywhere near the Monstematic!" she contradicted. "If you must put that captraption anywhere put it in the empty store room at the end of the corridor," she said.

Ria was no longer paying attention. Instead she was bent over the telescope to peer down at the planet below.

Zita fumed. This was *her* home. What right did this person have to come barging in without invitation and try to take over? "Aunt Ria," she said through clenched teeth, trying to maintain a calm, "why have you come all the way out here? I thought you were happily conquering all of Andromeda," she said pleasantly.

Ria scowled and moved to the largest throne and sat down. "If I take you into my confidence, it'll be when I choose. Just stay out of the way for now. This won't take long," she said.

"That's Roki's throne. He's very possessive of it. He won't like you wallowing it out," Mori remarked as she entered the throne room with Griff silently behind her.

Ria surveyed Moriko without much expression. "You must be one of the off-shoots," she said. Mori put a hand on Griff's arm when he made to move toward Ria. The older woman gave Griff a cold smile when she noted his posture. "And whatever you're supposed to be. A family of traitors from what I understand. Your parents must be so proud."

"You only say that because you haven't met Widow," Mori said without rancor. Both Zita and Griff seemed to be fuming. Mori on the other hand wasn't fazed at all by this malicious woman. "I saw your goons with some interesting equipment," she said conversationally.

"You'll find out what that's for soon. When it's set up we'll begin," Rio said as she entered the throne room. She raised a brow and checked out Griff, an appreciative smile forming on her lips. "Hello, cousins," she greeted without looking at either of the two girls.

Now that did slightly annoy Moriko. "Hello, Rio. How did you enjoy your trip to Earth?" she asked frostily.

"I'd dare say she didn't enjoy it quite as much as she hoped she would," Zita said drily. She'd observed her cousin's encounter from there.

Ria stood up. "What are they talking about?" she demanded of her daughter.

Rio blew out a long breath. "There is more opposition than we expected. It won't be a problem once we accomplish our mission," she said.

"Good. Drones! Prepare the Hatchery!" she shouted and turned toward Earth with a greedy expression on her face. Rio smirked. Zita, Moriko and Griff couldn't help but wonder what they were going to do about these two unpredictable guests they suddenly found themselves saddled with.

-X-

**Command Center**

Rei, once again dressed in normal clothes, addressed the assemblage of Rangers and others. "Moriko warned me just before Rio appeared. You see, the family Vile has another daughter. Ria Revile is mother's and Uncle Rito's youngest sister. Rio is her daughter, our cousin. For the past few thousand years she's operated extensively in the Andromeda Galaxy and has a fairly large foothold there. I don't know why she's here but it cannot be a good thing," she explained as she paced.

"I believe I can help explain a few things. According to my initial research, Morphing Technology has been shared in the Andromeda Galaxy. At least two planets now have Power Rangers and they are inspiring other planets to resist. The main team causing the most damage is from within territory that Ria Revile held for several thousand years," Beta Z said.

"But no one can definitively say why they're here now," Tai summed up.

"Moriko is going to do her best to find out. I know you all probably don't trust her, but I swear she does not want the Reviles here anymore than we do," Rei assured them.

"It's not so much lack of trust as just plain wary. Your other sister is more unpredictable than a tornado in Kansas," Taran said.

Rei nodded. "She'd take that as a compliment," she declared with a small smile.

"It's not like we have much choice," Lani said. "We'll just have to deal with whatever comes; like we always have," she declared.

"Amen, sister. Sing it," Fox declared.

"You zip it. I saw the shame you brought to the Black today," Chloe said in disgust. "I see I'm going to have to take a personal interest in your training," she said.

Fox dropped his head and groaned. The last thing he needed was Chloe hanging around nitpicking his training.

Danny sniggered at his sister and she winked at him. Tormenting Fox was going to be one of her greatest joys in life. She could see it already.

Tai even managed a slight laugh when others began to chuckle as well. "Any other updates we should be aware of since we're all together here?" he asked.

"Well, I can say that the distress beacons programmed into the Morphers was a success. This should steam-line our response time," Billie answered.

"And the project Hols and me is workin' on should be ready for a field test soon," Danny answered.

"No hints as to what this top secret project is? Not even to your two best friends in the world?" Wood asked and clapped Nath on the shoulder to include him in that. Nathan, for his part gave Danny a pitiful pout and puppy-dog eyes.



Billie scoffed. "That's just gross. Don't do that," she said and held up her hand to shield his expression from view.

"Holly won't even tell me and Lani, *her* best friends in the world," Manny complained with a pout of her own.

"I know what it is and that's all that matters," Tai said.

"Yeah, Rex warned me not to let you get too big-headed," Fox said. "I've failed again," he said sadly.

Lani hid a snicker as Tai glared at Fox.

"No worries, mate. We're all here to make sure Tai doesn't get too up himself," Sora said.

Lani snorted as she sucked in a laugh. She cleared her throat. "You two stop picking on Tai or you'll have to deal with me," she warned them.

"Yes, ma'am," they intoned at once.

Zara held up her hand. "I got an update. We still aren't Power Rangers," she declared.

Mel sighed. "We're here for training," she reminded her friend.

"We're here for experience. We have the skill to help. We should be allowed to help," Zara argued back.

"They have a point," Winter said.

"They do. While I agree, we can't allow you to go face monsters without the protection of power suits. Both Zhane and Karone were clear that the Astro Morphers shouldn't be used again except for extremely dire emergencies and there's no way the Zeonizers have enough power between them to sustain either of you for a prolonged period of time," Tai explained patiently.

Zara pouted and Mel sighed. It wasn't anything they hadn't heard before but it was still disheartening.

"Don't worry. There's always Putties you can help with," Tori assured them.

Zara wrinkled her nose but didn't respond. Mel just sighed again.

"If that's it, we'd better start getting back. Just be on alert," Tai said. He glanced at Lani. "We still on?" he asked.

"As if I'm going to let that purple-haired weirdo ruin date night," she answered. He smiled and took her hand. He linked their fingers. He gave the room at large a brief wave. The two teleported out.

Others began to trickle off.

Lammy remained quietly. Winter gave her a curious look. "What's wrong?" he asked.

She shook her head, not wanting to voice her thoughts. "Hey, let's you and me do something fun," she suggested suddenly.

Winter looked around covertly for a moment. "You mean like a date?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes. Why not? Unless I've been reading things wrong since we met," she said, putting her fists on her hips.

"No. Not at all. I know the perfect place," he said and held out his hand. Intrigued, she took his hand and the two of them left.

Soon only Beta Z was left alone in the Power Chamber, though Danny and Holly were busy in the Blue Lab. She opened an encrypted file in the databanks and analyzed it again. Countless times she's gone over this file but there was still an element missing. "Ay yi yi," she sighed and closed the file. She went back to work on the crisis at hand.

-x-

Four former Pink Rangers entered an empty building that shared an alley with the Scott Dojo. Until recently it was an office building but the owner went bankrupt and it was being sold off at an auction at the end of the week. Trailing behind the four older women were Melody and Zara. Zara suppressed a yawn but Melody was a little more enthusiastic about their purpose. "So who's idea was this?" she asked as she looked around. The building was wide and squat with three stories and a flat roof. The office areas were nice and spacious.

"If anyone can claim the credit it would be Kim. She's the one who first mentioned that her client base was expanding and she was thinking about looking for a place to teach a group rather than one-on-one," Cassie answered. "It snowballed from there as Kat and I reminisced about our dancing days," she added.

"There was wine involved. I like being a nurse but that was necessary when I mangled the tendons in my feet. I've always wanted to be involved in ballet again. Teaching sounded like the perfect way to do that," Kat said with a whimsical smile on her face.

"And I just want to be gainfully employed in something not spacey-wasey. My only qualifications at this point would get me jobs at R&D firms or something. In fact, I was about to accept a job at Nodroz when all this was brought up. No offense Melody but I need to get out of your grandmother's house," Cassie said quietly.

"Take me with you," Melody said in a hushed voice. They snickered together.

"So what are the rest of us doing here?" Zara asked. The potential business partners were accompanied by the two teenagers and Karone.

Cassie put her hands on either side of Karone's head. "She doesn't have any other friends here, so I let

her tag along," she said in a mock whisper.

Karone harrumphed and pulled Cassie's hands away from her ears. "Well, I can't say that isn't mostly true. But I am the one who told them about this building," she said. Though she was bunking with Cassie at Melody's grandmother's house, she'd been given a job by Jason. She was kung fu instructor at the Dojo. Though Fox was her main student, some of the other Rangers were showing interest in learning from her. Jason saw potential and created a position for her. She'd heard about the building from Jason and Adam chatting about it over break. While Cassie was talking her ear off about this idea the three other former Pink Rangers had, Karone remembered the building.

"I'm here because I wanted to come. You could have gone to the Youth Center with Tori and Chloe," Melody said.

Zara just shrugged. "Well, let's get to thinking pink then and look around," she declared.

"Thinking pink?" Kim asked, her eyes lighting up. "That is amazing. Think Pink. I love it," she said.

Kat grinned "Brilliant," she agreed.

Cassie giggled. She draped an arm around Zara and squeezed her close. "Think Pink! Dance and Gymnastics Studio," she said, flourishing her other hand in front of her as if envisioning a sign with the name on it. With a renewed sense of excitement, the little group began looking around the building, voicing ideas, and laughing together over this one or that one. Even Zara started to have fun. It was hard to resist a gaggle of Pink Rangers.

-x-

Not far away, a girl with lavender hair wearing large red glasses and a panda hoodie held a device in her hands. It was beeping intermittently, leading her somewhere. She made a face. She and her mother were searching for a power source they'd heard about. It had fallen to Earth millions of years ago, fragmented. If it was indeed the Soul Stone that had fallen to Earth, then a fragment was all they needed to crush their enemies in Andromeda. They'd reduced this planet to slag just for good measure.

Though they'd taken up residence on the Moon, their home, Revile Castle, was hidden in a pocket dimension monitoring the planet. Revile Castle is a spaceship where Ria and Rio rule over their servants and subjects. From scanning the planet, they suspected the fragments they were looking for was here in Angel Grove but they couldn't definitively pin-point a position.

That was how Rio found herself personally roaming around the streets of Angel Grove with a handheld scanner. It was far less accurate but when Bone Drones had alerted them to a potential signal--they usually had disguised Bone Drones doing this--Rio came down herself. The signal was weak but getting closer. Perhaps not the fragment but worth checking out. The scanner suddenly let out an eerie squeak. The source was in a wide squat building next to the Scott Dojo.

She smirked slightly. She tapped her glasses and the lenses turned yellow. She used them to scan the building for body heat. She saw six figures within. She tapped the side of her glasses again. "Mum, you'd better send me a distraction. This could get messy," she said even as a wicked grin stretched her face.

-X-

## Palace on the Moon

Zita gritted her teeth as she pushed a Bone Drone out of her way. Everywhere she turned, she was tripping over them. Ria was often lounging in Roki's throne when she wasn't fiddling with Zita's battle map. Rio was constantly interrupting Zita's work or bothering Moriko by hitting on Griff. It was enough to give anyone a headache. She'd thought a good old fashioned monster attack on Angel Grove would take her mind off things but when she went to Finster's lab she found it empty. Finster never left his lab. Even when the moon had been occupied by the Machine Empire, he'd remained, locked away in his lab with his precious Monstematic.

Finding the lab empty, Zita was going in search of her aunt. This had her name written all over it. "Where is Finster!" she demanded when she stomped into the throne room.

"I haven't seen your little rat-man," Ria said dismissively. She turned away from her niece when her daughter contacted her. The headgear wasn't just for show. It had actual functions. A wide smile split her face. "If you want to see a real monster, little girl, follow me," she said and whirled with a flourish of her cape. She strode out of the throne room.

Zita was livid. "Tell me what you've done with Finster! You have NO RIGHT coming into this palace acting as though you own it. *Thrax* is the next Master Vile, not you," she hissed.

Ria turned to her niece with a snarl. "And just where is your big brother? Why is Roki claiming dominion and usurping his place?" she asked cruelly.

"Thrax gave dominion of the Milky Way to Zita and Roki before he disappeared," Moriko said coolly as she came into the corridor. "There are blood rights to support his claim," she said and produced a dagger and sliced open her palm. Blood welled and then pooled on the floor. It began to arrange itself into a complex system of signs and runes.

Ria waved an arm and the blood disappeared. "I have no interest in this puny little galaxy. Yet. But you should warn your brother, dears, blood rights or not, *I* will be the next Master Vile. If I have to kill my brother, my nephews and my nieces so be it. It's the Vile way," she said. She turned and stalked down the corridor to the hatchery.

Zita approached Moriko and placed a hand over hers. Purple energy glowed between them briefly as she healed her sister.

"I see why Rito lit out of her like his balls were on fire," Griff commented as he made sure Moriko's hand was okay. "Do you really think she did something to Finster?" he asked Zita.

Zita pressed her lips into a thin dark line. "Finster has lived in this palace for ten thousand years. He never leaves. Suddenly he vanishes when she comes along? Even you should be able to make that connection," she said, though her heart wasn't really in the jibe. She was too upset.

To his credit, Griff ignored it. "I'll find him," he said. He liked the ratty little man and had no wish to see him come to harm because of this woman.

Moriko smiled at Griff. "Thank you. Finster doesn't deserve anything she may have done to him," she said. He kissed her palm and dropped her hand. He nodded to Zita and stepped into the shadows and all but disappeared. "We should see what Ria and Rio are up to," Moriko said to her sister, Zita nodded and they quietly went to the Hatchery.

Glowing incubators with rather plain looking iridescent eggs the size of basketballs lined the room. In the center was an apparatus that glowed green. A pipe connected it to the ceiling. A lever jutted out of one side. One Bone Drone held open a glass door while another carefully placed one of the basketball sized eggs inside. He almost dropped it, "Careful, you mixed bag of nuts and bones!" Ria shrieked but he recovered. The other Done Drone closed the door and they both scurried away. The green glow intensified and the egg's shell began to crack.

Ria typed something into an interface on top of the contraption near the pipe then pulled the lever. The egg was sucked up into the pipe. It was then launched to earth, where it landed. The shell completely fell away and a fully realized monstrous menace stood in Angel Grove. Gray and somewhat tentacle-faced with one attached wing and a large sword, Aciduoux looked around him. There was water everywhere. He could feel it.

He began running and found a fountain. It was perfect. People were already screaming, but when he jabbed his sword over a pipe feeding the fountain, the spray became hydrochloric acid. The pressure was also increased. The fountain exploded under a geyser of the corrosive substance. Aciduoux laughed. "Run, run little humans. When you're all digested, I'll eat you up!" he cried.

Overhead, small one-man flight vehicles with skeletal details appeared and began shooting up Angel Grove.

-x-

Danny finished a final touch on the special project. He let out a low whistle. "I think we did good," he told Holly. He gave her a grin. "We make a pretty good team," he said.

Holly nodded. "I think so, too," she said with a smile.

Emergency alarms began going off. The two of them rushed to the Power Chamber. "Ay yi yi!" Beez cried. "Not only is there a monster attacking, but there are enemy aircraft tearing up he city," she reported.

Holly and Danny shared a look. "We can help with that," Danny said.

"I really hope so," Tai said when he appeared in the Power Chamber to assess the situation. "Take Lani, Fox, Wood, Tori, Autumn and Lammy to deal with the UFO's. Give them a crash course very quickly," he instructed Danny. "The rest of us will deal with the monster," he said.

"Right, Boss," Danny said. He twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

"Tyrannosaurus!"

-X-

Bright streaks of lights preceded the arrival of seven color-coordinated Power Cycles on the streets of Angel Grove. Sleek and streamlined with clearly Ranger specific details, they were impressive. They each came to a stop as the riders looked up into the sky.

Male Black shielded his visor with his hand. "Not to belittle your efforts here or anything, but we're down here, and those things are up there," he pointed out.

"Are you in any position to criticize?" Electrum asked him.

Male Blue just grinned under his helmet. "Oh, ye of little faith. You gonna have to learn not to underestimate me," he said. "Hold on to ya britches and activate Glider mode," he said and flipped a switch on his console. He leaned forward and gripped the handlebars. A streamlined, winged-glider formed around him. He sped forward and the now Power Glider took flight.

"I'll learn my lesson one of these days," Black muttered as he flipped his switch and prepared for flight. The others did the same.

"Ladies and gentlemen, meet the Battle Conversion Vehicles. They are equipped for land, sea, and air. Blasters provide most of the firepower but for extreme emergencies, all but enough power to safely land can be compressed into one Battle Cannon Shot. Use it wisely," Blue instructed as he maneuvered after one of the enemy air crafts. It fired on him, and he quickly dodged and returned fire. He scored a hit. The craft sparked and smoked and seem to fade out of existence.

Female Red banked sharply when an enemy craft tried to play chicken with her. She managed a 180 degree turn and got behind the craft and fired several times. The craft started spiraling wildly before it disappeared.

Male Yellow was whizzing along behind one of the enemy aircrafts, trying to keep up with the skillful maneuverings of it's pilot. "I feel like a Rebel battling Empire forces. This is so awesome," he said as he finally managed to fire on his enemy, scoring a direct hit.

Female Green managed a chuckle. "Leave it to Wood," she remarked. "Whoa, Lammy, you have a tail," she said and turned to follow the craft that was following the VelociGlider.

"I can't shake him," Electrum said as she fired on one of them.

The PteroGlider and StygiGlider moved in to box it in. It was slightly larger than the others and differently shaped. "We got him," femme Pink said. She and femme Green fired on the larger craft and it exploded. It sent the two smaller vessels off course. It took them a few minutes to right themselves again and get back in the game.

-X-

Aciduoux was tracing the water networks of Angel Grove, making fountains and fire hydrants explode with hydrochloric acid as he went. A sharp whistle caught his attention and he turned. A small compact cannon ball crashed into his middle. Female Black, propelled by male Red's enhanced strength, sent them both flying several hundred yards from the acid spraying into the sky. He crashed and she rolled off of him.

"Augh! What?" he snarled as he got to his feet.

"That was just the opening gambit," she told him. "Power Axe," she summoned and slashed at the monster. Aciduoux brought up his sword to block and knocked her back with a swift kick to her middle.

"That ain't very polite," Gold said. "StegoMace!" He jumped and swung his weapon. Aciduoux tried to block but he didn't expect the counterattack that followed.

"CeratoSword!" Silver's attack had him stumbling back.

"Power Grips!" Yellow zoomed around the monster in flurry, sending sparks wherever her Grips snapped.

Aciduoux roared in annoyance. He swung his sword preemptively and caught her off guard. She went crashing into Green, who deftly caught her. "Thanks," she said woozily.

"Anytime," he said and set her on her feet "Stygian Armor!" He also summoned the Stygian Blade and ran forward. He sparred for a moment with the monster, phasing out when Aciduoux tried to slice him. He spun and jabbed the monster in the side. His sword sizzled and pitted from the acidic innards of the monster but the wound healed almost immediately. His surprised gave Aciduoux time to knock him aside.

Pink hovered slightly and fired several arrows in quick succession. Aciduoux swatted away most of them but one thunked into his shoulder and sizzled. He ripped it out and it was practically melted. Pink fired again and the arrows hit in several places, making the monster stagger back.

"That's what I needed," Blue said and tapped her helmet, making her computer disappear. "Power Sai!" She threw one, and it missed whizzing past his head. He turned to scoff at where it landed, having missed her mark completely. She was already aiming her second Sai. It caught him in a place on his back that bubbled and smoked. "It's up to you now, Tai," she said.

Red had already summoned his Power Armor. He drove forward and jumped, bringing his Tyranno-Sword down with all his enhanced strength. Aciduoux sparked and crackled. He roared and stumbled forward. He wasn't down yet, however.

"Magnum Power Cannon!" Female Black summoned. She pressed the trigger. "Magnum Blast!" The powerful blast slammed into Aciduoux and he exploded, leaving behind a small egg. The egg exploded and a giant Aciduoux formed.

Zara and the pink brigade were finally finished touring the building. As they were discussing their next step, the monster sirens went off. "Uh-oh," Cassie said as they began looking to see if the source of the disturbance was nearby. What they saw surprised them. Rio appeared with a band of Bone Drones. They surrounded the group as Rio held up a device that was making a strange whirring sound.

Rio scowled at the readings she was getting. "That's not possible," she said and hit the side of the detector. Nope, the readings she was getting was definitely coming from a person. One of these women, but other signals were interfering. "Separate them," she instructed the Bone Drones.

"Look, lady, you're making a big mistake," Zara said and ducked as one of the Drones tried to grab her. He made another attempt, and she crouched down and swept him off his feet.

Rio made an impatient gesture. "I said separate them!" she shouted.

"Again, really big mistake," Melody agreed as the former Pink Rangers fanned out away from each other naturally.

Rio was beginning to frown more. Sure it was clearing up her readings but she was really getting sick of being told she was mistaking. "Why is that?" she snapped.

"Because the adults are all former Power Rangers," Rei answered from where she'd snuck up beside Rio.

Her appearance seemed to be the catalyst the group needed to take out the Bone Drones. Karone being pregnant put her at a disadvantage but Zara and Melody flanked her, making sure she was okay.

"I'm not in the mood to fight with you," Rio said to Rei absently. She'd finally figured out which of the women was giving off the energy she was looking for. It was the white haired one. She winked out from beside Rei and appeared beside Kat. She grabbed the woman by the hair and poked her in the arm with the reader. Kat cried out, more startled than in pain.

Rei pursed her lips. "Want it or not," she said grimly and summoned a White Spell and tossed it at Rio.

Rio let go of Kat and whirled away. She frowned at the definitive proof that she'd been led astray. The woman had at one time been exploded to a powerful power source, but it wasn't the Soul Stone. She put the reader away. "You asked for it, coz," she said and ran toward Rei. She jumped and kicked forward. Rei barely managed to get her arms up to block. She was knocked back. Rio was already launching into her next attack. She kicked Rei in the side and sent her flying back. Rio was already moving again and brutally kicked the younger cousin in the back.

Rei landed with a crash. Rio walked toward her. "You really thought you were a match for me?" she asked and scoffed. "You better off as part of Zita," she said. She made a gun with her fingers and her laser pistol appeared.

A garbage can lid flew into her side, knocking her off guard. The lid, spun back and forth, hitting her several times before she caught it. She glowered at it and saw Zara nearby. The Bone Drones had all



been defeated and the other women were beginning to regroup. "You should learn how to fight from some of your friends. At least make it interesting next time," Rio told Rei. She retreated in a puff of purple smoke.

Zara and Melody rushed over to help Rei to her feet. "Are you okay?" Melody asked.

"I'll be fine, but I'll never hear the end of it from Sora," Rei assured her. "Are you okay?" she asked Kat.

Kat looked at the needle prick on her arm. "I'll be fine, but I think she drew my blood," she said with a frown.

"We should get to the Command Center," Kim said. Cassie nodded her agreement and the little group teleported.

-x-

Giant Aciduoux was heading toward the Midtown Reservoir, which supplied half of Angel Grove with tap water. He'd turn it to hydrochloric acid and devour every human he could that were exposed to it.

"Billie, get back to the Command Center. Get with Dr. Bill and see what we can do about the water the monster ruined," Red instructed.

Blue nodded and teleported.

The crystal on male Red's gauntlet began to glow. "Magnum Alpha Megazord!" From various places around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. Their pilots were teleported into an enormous combined cockpit except for female Blue and Black. Silver split into two to take their spots.

Aciduoux took a swing at the Megazord. The Megazord retaliated with a swing of the tail. Aciduoux caught the tail and spun the Megazord and sent it crashing into a building.

"Oops, our bad," Pink said apologetically with a grimace.

Female Black activated something on her Morpher. "Alphamax Cannon!" The Alphamax Cannon and she teleported aboard. "I'll give you guys a bit of breathing room. Get ready," she said. She approached the center console in the cannon. She grabbed the dual joysticks and targeted the monster. "Target Acquired. Firing!" She depressed the buttons. Two by two, from the outside in the points of the Alphamax Cannon began firing, hitting the monster in succession. Each hit glowed. Finally the middle barrel fired. A beam of blindingly bright light hit. The other ten points connected in a circle and hit.

Aciduoux stumbled back, sparking and smoking but he wasn't out yet. He swung his sword at the Cannon. It connected. Black yelped. The seven Power Gliders zoomed by, shooting him, not damaging but annoying him. "Thanks guys," she breathed.

"No problem, partner," male Black's voice answered. She felt vaguely proud of him.

"It's about time we finished this up," male Red declared. "Magnum Dino Blast!" He lined the target up on his screen. He pressed the buttons, the dino mouths come open and their tail whipped up and four points of energy were fired at the monster. It blasted through him, scattering him into nothingness.

-X-

### **Palace on the Moon**

Rio reappeared. When she realized she was still holding the garbage can lid, she threw it down with a snarl. "You two have been holding information back," she accused Zita and Moriko, who were placidly playing chess in a sitting room.

Zita, who felt more than a little satisfaction that their monster had died spectacularly, glanced up. She raised an eyebrow. "We were told to stay out of it and that you'd handle your own business," she reminded her cousin.

Rio took a step toward her. Ria came up behind her and put a hand on her shoulder. She raised her eyebrows at her nieces. "You will tell us everything you know about Angel Grove," she said.

Moriko shook her head. "No, I don't believe we will. It's more fun watching you figure it out yourself," she said and gave them her best grin.

Zita nodded. She moved one of her pieces. "Check," she said as if she'd forgotten about their stewing relatives glaring at them.

Rio stepped forward, dark energy swirling around her fist.

Finally, Moriko looked at her seriously. "You don't want to take on two of us. Especially *us*. We are not Rei," she said in a calm but slightly dangerous voice.

Ria pursed her lips. "We have our own problems. Whatever they think they know, we can easily learn elsewhere," she told her daughter and stalked away. Rio gave her cousins one last glance and followed her mother.

"Any ideas what they're looking for?" Moriko asked Zita.

The other girl shook her head. "Is your Neanderthal having any luck finding Finster?" she asked.

It was Moriko's turn to shake her head. The two of them sank into a brooding silence as they continued their game. The Palace was becoming a very uneasy place these days. Something needed to be done about the Reviles.

-X-

Billy found the best solution for the hydrochloric acid problem. Baking powder and a dash of magic. During the debriefing, he'd gone to Midtown Reservoir to distribute the concoction and soon the water

was back to normal and no one had been seriously injured. There were still a few questions as to the true motives of why the Reviles had come to attack Earth.

Kat underwent a scan. They concluded that her molecular structure was more densely irradiated by Zeo energy than the other former Zeo Rangers.

"So they were zeroing in on her Zeo energy. Why?" Tai asked.

"It didn't seem like she was especially interested after she tested my blood," Kat said out loud.

"Zita and Moriko don't know what they're after either, but they've pretty much taken over the palace and have even disappeared Finster," Rei said, rubbing her side as she wandered in from the Medi-Lab.

Sora frowned at her. "You should be laying down," he said.

"I'll be fine. I heal faster than humans," she said dismissively. She more than a little annoyed by how easily Rio had beaten her. She needed more training than how to use her staff as a weapon, that was becoming clear. She wondered why she could remember every spell Zita ever learned, but she didn't have her martial arts skills. It was aggravating. She Mori was the same. But Mori had Griff to train her. She chewed the inside of her cheek. Maybe she should ask Lammy for extra help. She hated to admit she was too embarrassed to ask Sora. Besides, she figured Sora would be too easy on her whereas Lammy wouldn't hold back at all.

"Well, this human's head is still ringing," Chloe said. She clapped Fox on the back. Fox grunted and stumbled. "You did pretty good today. But from now on, I'm in on the Kung Fu lessons. You can't just be good in BCVs and Zords. You gotta hold your own on the ground next time," she said.

Fox rubbed his shoulder, half proud half mortified. "Yeah, yeah, I got it," he said.

"We'll make a Ranger outta you yet," Danny said and also slapped him on the back.

"Ow! What is with you Kennedy's?" Fox asked.

Autumn laughed and moved forward to save him. "We gotta go, Our shifts start soon," she said. She rubbed his back and they teleported.

Tai was smiling halfishly. "Rei, soon as you know something from your sisters--"

"You'll be my first stop," she promised.

He nodded and broke up the debriefing. As everyone trickled out, he stood pensively, deep in thought. Lani leaned her head against his arm. "Missing your boyfriend?" she asked teasingly.

Tai chuckled. "That, too," he answered. "Mainly just wrapping my head around this new turn of events," he said. He kissed the top of her. "I gotta jet. My turn to cook supper. You wanna come over?" he asked.

Lani sighed. "Can't. Have a paper to write after supper," she said and crooked a finger at him. He

obediently bent down so she could kiss him on the cheek. She slipped away from him and teleported. He teleported as well, leaving the Command Center quiet for once.

-xThe End Chapter 20x-

## 21 - Bright Lights, Big City

Angel Grove Municipal Auditorium was practically empty, just a few workers were setting up the stage for the performance that was scheduled for the following night. The flyers connected to the show proclaimed *California College of Performing Arts Freshman Exhibition Presents **Lumina Project**. Featuring the talents of Selena Vega, Marcy Sharpe, Quenton Albreicht and Ryden Ecks*. And in the largest font possible *Simon Creed - Producer, DJ, Vocalist, Stage Manager*. True to his word, however, Simon Creed was indeed directing the stage set-ups. At nineteen, his usually reddish-blond hair was currently mostly blue and hung in his face. He was on the thin, pale side with freckles, but he was also tall and fit. "We have a sound check in twenty minutes. I need my booth and the instruments in place already, people!" he shouted at the workers.

Sitting in the very back row of the Auditorium amongst a group of friends, Danny snickered as he listened to the older guy harangue the hapless stage crew.

"I can totally see the family resemblance," Nathan commented.

"What, are you saying we're a bossy family?" Chloe asked him, raising a brow.

"That's exactly what he's saying," Billie answered. Tori and Wood snickered. Chloe harrumphed and stuck her nose in the air.

"But this seriously cool that you got to bring us here for the sound check. CPAF is like one of the best music schools in the country but they hardly ever have concerts or anything in Angel Grove," Wood said, starry eyed.

"You're not supposed to be here," a voice interrupted their conversation. The small group glanced up at the guy towering above them. He wore a dark hoody and thick rimmed glasses which obscured most of his features.

Chloe got to her feet and in the face of the guy even though he towered over her almost as much as her brother. She did take the time to note that he had really pretty dark blue eyes. "We were invited, thanks," she responded.

Danny cleared his throat, got to his feet and pushed his sister back a little. "Soz, guy. But we *were* invited. We'll pipe down if we're bothering anybody," he said. He was suddenly the one under intense scrutiny.

The hooded guy finally relaxed a bit. "You're Simon's cousin," he said finally. "Sorry," he apologized.

"Cousins. Plural," Chloe interjected and smiled sweetly.

"Are you one of the tiny names on the flyer?" Nathan asked.

"He is. Please excuse his rudeness. He never seems to have learned manners. This is Quen Albreicht. I'm Selena Vega. So awesome to meet you guys," said a pretty girl with dark eyes, and short edgy dark hair with a pink streak.

"Yo. I'm Danny, my sister Chloe. These are our friends, Billie, Nathan, Wood and Tori," he said as the other teenagers got to their feet.

"No way! This is Code Blue?" Simon asked as he approached the group. He took in the tall blond girl with braids with disbelief.

"Who's Code Blue? What?" the remaining members of the Lumina Project finally joined them. The girl who'd spoken, Marcy Sharpe was a pretty blonde with long curls. Ryden Ecks was a black guy in a fedora with light colored eyes and a neat goatee. He raised a brow at the girl as well.

Simon rubbed the back of his neck. "She, er, made it possible for Ryden to attend East High," he said evasively, eyeing up the other kids.

"What are we missing, Billie?" Nathan asked in a whisper.

Billie shrugged. "You think Rei and Lammy are the first aliens I've dummied up papers for?" she asked.

Nathan blinked. "I never thought about it. You're just so amazing I figured it was just something you could do," he said. Billie's disgruntled, red-faced expression had Chloe and Tori in a fit of barely silent giggles.

The older students were staring at them. Simon was still flabbergasted. "Jeeze. What were you, like ten?" he asked.

"I was twelve," Billie answered and fidgeted agitatedly.

"I think you're making her uncomfortable, Si. Are we ready for the sound check and rehearsal?" Marcy asked brightly.

Simon nodded. "Yeah, let's go," he said.

"Have a seat and enjoy the show," Selena told the group as she ushered Quen and Ryden down to the stage behind Marcy and Simon. The two guys eyed the other group suspiciously but eventually put their minds on what they were there to do.

"So, what was that all about?" Tori asked them.

It was Wood who answered. "Dude, no way. They're the Guardian Rangers," he said, putting the pieces together before anyone else did.

"Huh, that makes sense," Danny said. Billie nodded.

Chloe shook her head but sat down with her friends. She wondered if that pretty-eyed guy was single.

She doubted it though by the way he treated the girl in pink. Oh, well. Eye candy was still eye candy especially when he finally shed the hoodie and glasses.

-x-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Rio stalked into the war room where her mother mulled over Zita's map of Angel Grove. "Mother, I cannot find those insufferable sisters anywhere," she declared, crossing her arms over her chest.

Ria pursed her lips. She was still trying to fruitlessly get them to share information with her about Angel Grove. Zita's map only seemed to make sense to Zita. They were every bit as annoying as her sister always was. She bared her teeth and made a disgusted sound. "It'd be too much to hope they abandoned the place," she said. She tapped her fingers on the tabletop as she thought. "Any luck with the scans?" she asked, hoping for some good news for once.

Rio gave a cool smile. "We're picking up on something. Whatever it is, it's putting out more power than the blond girl that threw off my sensor last time," she said. "I've been thinking of the best way to distract the Power Rangers. I think I have an idea," she said.

"Should we go to the hatchery?" Ria asked imperiously.

Rio nodded. She led the way though it still bothered her that she had no idea where the sisters were. She knew that Grifforzer was fruitlessly searching for the ratty Finster but Zita, at least, should have been annoyingly underfoot. "This one will do nicely," she said as she patted the top of an incubator. It's eerie glow illuminating an egg that looked no different than any other egg but clearly the Reviles knew what they potentially contained.

Ria's lips quirked into a wicked smile. "I think you're right," she agreed. "Bone Drones!" she shouted. Immediately several of the Drones rushed forward to take the egg from it's incubator into the hatching machine. When they closed the door, Ria tapped a few instructions into the interface and pulled the lever. She laughed as the egg was sucked up into the pipe. It was then launched to Earth.

Rio smirked. "I have a good feeling about this one," she said. She disappeared in a puff of smoke.

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As it turned out, both of Repulsas were on Earth. While Rei was out and Griff was hunting for Finster, Mori was holed up in her sister's room at the Youth Center reading her manga. Zita on the other hand was out by Tai's place staring at the pair of cherry trees that so vexed her. She wasn't sure why she felt drawn to this place, but she was. She'd been on the other side of this gateway. It was perfectly ordinary. Wasn't it?

She scowled and whirled away from them. She whirled back with a fistful of powerful energy, but she hesitated throwing it. She growled and crushed out the energy in her fist. She should be trying to figure out how to get Ria and Rio out of the Palace, not being taunted by innocuous trees in the middle of nowhere. She sighed and sat down at the foot of one of the trees. She rested her back against it. Energy

tickled at her skin but not in an unpleasant way. She closed her eyes and let her mind relax. She'd hadn't had her guard down like this since the Palace had been invaded. At least she knew the place was safe. Before she realized it, she'd fallen asleep.

-X-

Transistrox landed a little on the outskirts of Angel Grove. He was a dark metallic monster with a red helmet with seemed to be squared off antenna, cogwheels for shoulder guards and spiked balls as knee guards. He carried a chain-draped sword and a shield shaped like a subwoofer. He looked around as people saw him and began to panic. "Now, we can't have all that. Mellow out," he said in a lazy tone and held up his shield. White noise erupted and enveloped all those within listening range.

As people heard the soothing sounds of static and whispers, they calmed down and went back to mindlessly doing what they were doing before. "That's right, lovelies. We'll keep my being here between you and me," he said as he danced along, spinning and moonwalking backwards. "We don't want too many unwelcome visitors before I'm ready," he said.

It was perhaps already too late for that. Even on the outskirts of the city, the net of former Power Rangers was extensive. A pro baseball player on his way home from practice could easily spot a monster and let the proper people know about it.

-X-

Project Lumina's show was supposed to last about an hour, but the sound check and rehearsal was taking a bit longer than that as they finagled with locations for the best sound with instruments and voices, or got used to the stage size for dance routines. While Everyone else was enraptured by the entire process, Danny and Billie quickly lost interest and were having a video game battle on hand held systems.

"You guys could pretend to be interested," Chloe scolded them when one of their games got a little too loud. She had her camera out and was occasionally snapping pictures. Simon wanted to use some for the Project Lumina website.

"Si knows it ain't my scene. Meetin' up for pizza afterwards is the only reason I'm here," he said. "I just came to bring them," he said, gesturing to Nathan and Wood's enraptured expressions.

"I got dragged along for this," Billie said and held up her device.

"You think Simon will let me see his set-up?" Wood asked, totally not paying the least bit of attention to their conversation.

"Those are custom guitars. They must've been made to melodize only with each other," Nathan declared as Selena and Quen finished playing a duet once they'd found the spot that fit Simon's standards.

Tori giggled. "Jeeze, you're cousin is a slave driver. I'm with Nathan, I can totally see the family resemblance," she teased her friends. Before Chloe could retaliate, her wrists started vibrating. "Hold that tart comeback," she said and turned around, twisting her wrist. "Tori here," she said.



"You and Billie. Now," Tai's voice told her.

"We're on it," Tori answered. "I'm stealing Billie for awhile," she announced brightly out loud. She kissed Wood's cheek and hopped up. She grabbed Billie's arm and dragged her out of the Auditorium. The lobby outside was empty. "Ready?" she asked Billie.

"Ready," Billie answered and twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

"Pterodactyl!"

-x-

Transistrox had spotted the Monster Alert poles and was attempting to climb one of them. If he could hook up his sound machine into the system, his beautiful noise would be broadcast all over the city. "Ah, a whole city of doe-eyed livestock. My mistresses could tear it up without interference!" he chortled to himself.

"Hey! Get down from there!"

Red laser blasts hitting the pole made him lose his grip and he fell off the pole. "Hey! That was dangerous! I could have seriously hurt myself!" he scolded the Power Rangers that surrounded him.

Red holstered his Blaster. "Then you shouldn't have been climbing it to begin with," he pointed out.

"That's beside the point," Transistrox said and pointed his shield at the Rangers. Instead of soothing white noise, a noise like a ship's horn magnified a hundred times exploded from it. The sound energy was actually enough to knock them off their feet even as they attempted to block out the sound with their hands.

"Oh, that Cyberman reject has it coming," male Black said loudly to hear himself over the ringing in his ears. He shook his head. "Power Blades!" he summoned. Two long, single edges blades swords appeared in his hands. He gave them an experimental swish. He ran forward and exercised some of his new, hard-won skills on the monster. The chain-draped sword managed to block once, but utilizing his agility, Black got under his arm and slashed at his side with the other.

Sparks flew and the monster whirled out of the way, dropping Bone Drone eggs as he did so. "Suck on that Rangers!" he said as the Bone Drones grew and engaged the Rangers while he once again attempted to get to the speakers, which were now beginning to sound the alarm, warning of a monster attack on the city.

Several Bone Drones turned on Black, wielding their scythes at him. He did a good job of fending them off.

"Wow, Tai's some kind of miracle worker," Yellow remarked and sped out of the way as several Bone Drones turned their attention to her. "Power Grips!" she summoned, and began to take them down around her.

Blue was utilizing her ability to become invisible to the fullest, she'd disappear only to reappear and deliver a swift kick to the body or a sweep of the legs before delivering a final blow with her Power Sais. "There was a reason Mina chose him as her First General," she said. She found it much easier to talk about her dark days as if talking about another person.

Power Fans in hand, Pink whirled through a group of Bones Drones, "As if we needed more proof that you were a genius," she said. She squeaked and dropped, rolling away as a Bone Drone suddenly launched itself at her. Coming up in a crouch, her visor popped open and she shrieked in his face, disorienting it. A quick swipe with her Fan as she came up, sent his mechanoid head flying through the air.

Black danced out of the way as it landed near him. "Gruesome," he said and kicked it at a one of the Bone Drones sneaking up behind Green.

Green whirled around and took out the Drone with his Blade. "Thanks," he said and gave Black a little salute. He threw his shield up as several other Drones jumped at him, scythes fully prepared to slice him to ribbons. He grunted under the strain as he felt each thunk. He phased and dropped the shield. They crashed into each other, mangling themselves as he harmlessly got out of the way before rematerializing.

Red was after Transistrox, summoning his Power Armor and drawing his TyrannoSword. He barreled through the Bone Drones and caught the monster before he could start climbing the pole again. Transistrox was ready for him. He turned and blasted the sound wave at him again. Red threw up his arm, activating his shield. Even planting his feet with all his strength, he slid back several yards, leaving ruts of broken concrete.

Thinking he had the upper hand, Transistrox attempted to climb the pole again, but Red ran forward and grabbed his ankle and pulled him down. The both crashed into the ground. Transistrox kned him in the face with his spiky knee guards.

-X-

When the monster sirens began to sound, Simon finally gave up fiddling with his set-up. "What is that God-awful noise?" he asked.

"That would be the monster alarm. Angel Grove is under attack," Danny explained. "We should probably get to a safe zone," he suggested.

Ryden and Quen shared a look. Before Simon could ask what a safe zone was, the two of them were already on their way out of the auditorium. "Hey, wait!" Simon said. Hopelessly, he and the two girls were after them.

"Hey! Stay out of it!" Chloe called after them, but it was too late. She, Danny, Wood, and Nathan spilled out of the auditorium behind them to find them being held up by a odd looking girl with large red glasses, a pom-pom topped panda hat, and rainbow leggings.

She was holding something similar to a camera that was making a whining noise. "Oh, boy! This is

fantastic," she said gleefully.

"We're not famous enough for groupies and autographs," Simon said and took half a step back.

The girl gave him a baleful glance. "Ya! I have no interest in you, freckles," she said. A wide grin stretched her face. "I want her," she said and pointed at Selena. Quen and Ryden immediately put themselves in front of her.

"It's Rio!" Wood declared. "Get away from her!"

"She's an evil space hag!" Nathan warned.

"Hag! Who are you calling a hag, Robin Hood?" she demanded as her form shimmered, changing to her usual military uniform.

"You're not exactly disproving his point," Chloe pointed out, eying her outfit distastefully.

Rio sputtered. She threw down a handful of Drone eggs. "Bone Drones! Get them!" she ordered. Drones attacked not only Chloe's group, but also the other group of older students.

"Protect the Light," Ryden said and launched into action. His rhythmic fighting style almost resembled dancing. It was the official martial art of his home planet, Promethius. As Drones attacked him, he slid out of the way and lashed out with a well placed kick or hit.

"Really? What do you think we've been doing for the past five years?" Simon asked dryly. Like his cousins, he was a multiple martial arts champion and had been using his skills for years defending the Fifth Light. He launched into battle without hesitation, fighting Bone Drones off.

"The Light can look out for herself, thanks, boys," Selena sniffed. Her ex-Marine, adoptive father had been training her all her life to defend herself. Five years ago, she found out why. She was the princess of a far-off planet who also happened to possess within her a powerful magical energy that frankly scared the bejeezes out of her sometimes.

"Still, we swore to protect the Light. It's what we do," Marcy said good-naturedly. Though she'd never practiced martial arts until she became a Power Ranger, five years of training with them had made her into quite the warrior as she mixed the Promethian and Earth styles together gracefully. "Besides, I thought you liked it when Quen got all protective," she added mischievously.

"She does," Quen said. He'd always known the identity of the Fifth Light. His grandfather had been her original Guardian that brought her from Promethius. He'd also brought Quen, who'd spent his whole life protecting her. He'd also been a little in love with her for as long as he could remember. That made protecting her a no brainer. These Bone Drone things weren't going to stop him from doing that.

"I ain't sure what exactly all that's about, but if it's the girl she wants, the girl she ain't gettin'," Danny declared. "Surround 'em," he told his friends. He twisted his wrists and activated the distress beacon, but didn't Morph. Chloe, Wood and Nathan fanned out and surrounded the group surrounding Selena, but they needed help. Rio was not exactly going to just give up and go away.

Rio sneered. "Why are there always so many useless obstacles?" she demanded. She held her fingers up in a gun shape and her laser appeared. She pointed it at the group.

"Heads up!" Danny shouted and slid forward, projecting his force-field as widely as he could. He cried out at the strain.

"Danny!" Chloe gasped. "Hey, you, two," she said, and managed to get Quen and Ryden's attentions. "Throw me at her," she said. She scoffed at their dumbfounded expressions. "What? You just saw my brother project a force-field from his hands. Are you really going to quibble with me over this?" she asked.

Quen shrugged. Ryden nodded. They each went down on a knee and grabbed one of her legs, as they came up with her, they launched her toward Rio. She stretched out, both fists in front of her and went solid. Her fists caught Rio in the middle and the both of them crashed through the glass front doors of the auditorium and landed in the street. Chloe rolled off of the space witch and got to her feet.

"Your cousins are certainly unique," Marcy commented to Simon.

"You haven't seen the flying boy yet," Wood said with a grin on his face. They spilled through the door behind Chloe and Rio.

Rio got to her feet and snarled. Bone Wings zoomed overhead and began firing on the area.

"I'd call that an escalation," Nathan said.

"Take care of that! I'll handle Rio while our guests finish up with the Bone Drones," Electrum Ranger said. Already the Red and Green Gliders were zooming in to engage the Bone Wings.

"We'll do the whole filling in thing later," Danny told Simon. He twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Triceratops!"

"Mastodon!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Smilodon!"

Ryden sighed through his nose. He tapped a red metallic bracelet around his arm and it transformed into a shield shaped device. "It's time to Light It Up!" he called. The others did the same. They held the shield over their clamped their hands over the shields. Each Lighter activated.

"Fifth Guardian! Pink!" Selena called.

"Fourth Guardian! Blue!" Simon called.

"Third Guardian! Yellow!" Marcy called.

"Second Guardian! Black!" Quen called.

"First Guardian! Red!" Ryden called.

From each Lighter, a bright colored light enveloped their bodies, forming their power suits, helmets and sidearms. "We are the Guardians of the Fifth Light!"

"Power Cycles!" The other group of Power Rangers summoned their vehicles. "Activating Glider Mode!" The four cycles turned into Gliders and sped off to join the aerial battle.

"Our Cycles need to do that, Si," Black Guardian said. He side-stepped a Bone Drone and then kicked it in the knee and kneed it in the head.

"Seriously," Pink Guardian agreed as she slipped around a Drone only to drive her elbow into the area between its shoulder blades.

Rio was fuming now. "Why are there always more and more Power Rangers?" she shrieked.

"I'm the only one you need to worry about at the moment," Electrum told him. "We haven't formally met yet," she said as the front of her helmet popped open. "I'm Lammy. My brother really doesn't like you," she said musingly.

"The feeling is mutual. So I suppose this is the part where you tell me I have to go through you to get to the girl?" she asked.

"It doesn't need saying," Electrum said. Her helmet closed back up. "But just a warning; I'm not as nice as Rei," she said. In fact, she just came from a training session with Rei. She fully understood why Rio had triumphed. She wasn't very physically strong, had little training except with her staff as a defensive weapon. Lammy was working on fixing that, but they still had a way to go.

Rio was less than impressed. To her mind, none of these Rangers were a match for her. More nuisance than actual threat. "I have more important things to do than play with you, so get out of my way," she said and went to knock Electrum aside as easily as she'd taken out Rei.

She grossly underestimated her opponent. Electrum sidestepped, grabbed her arm, twisted, and landed a blow to her sternum that had Rio stumbling back, gasping for breath. She narrowed her eyes and launched herself at the mutt. The two powerful women traded attacks and counter-attacks.

Rio turned several backflips and gave herself some space. She made her laser gun appear and fired at Electrum.

"VelociRapier!" Electrum summoned and with faster-than-the-eye flicks of her wrist she knocked each pellet aside. Occasionally one would hit, bouncing off her suit in sparks but it wasn't enough to knock her off her feet.

Rio looked at her incredulously. She dropped her gun and seethed. "Fine then, if that's how you want to

do it," she said and held up her fists. A storm of dark energy began swirling between them.

"Lammy! No! You can't counter that! Everyone, get away!" Rei shouted. She'd been on the outskirts of the fight, helping the Guardian Rangers with the Bone Drones. Rio was creating a very dark, violent spell. Rei wasn't even sure if she and her sisters together would be able to counter it as they were now. Lammy was powerful, but it seemed Rio was willing sacrifice her control to win.

It was too late, Rio released the spell. The dark spell engulfed them.

-x-

Red was already exhausted. Pulling the monster off the alarm pole had all but taken the last of it out of him. Then the spiked knee to the face didn't help. He didn't quite lose his morph, but it wouldn't take much more. He jumped to his feet and circled around the monster.

"Take a breather, boss. We got this," Silver said as three of him and Gold appeared around the monster.

Red nearly deflated with relief. "If you insist," he said and graciously bowed out.

Transistrox looked around him warily. He slashed with his sword in a wide arc at the three Silver Rangers and aimed his shield at Gold and blasted him with sound.

"Sorry, didn't hear that," Gold remarked. He'd wisely turned his hearing off when Beez informed them what they were up against. He rushed in and smashed the shield with his StegoMace. It crumpled under the blow.

Transistrox was flabbergasted but retaliated swiftly, kicking out at Silver and throwing the shield at Gold. He parried lunges from the two other Silver Rangers.

Red retreated a fair distance, but he had no intention of sitting on the sidelines by any means. "Magnum Power Cannon!" he summoned and stood behind.

Silver became one again and nodded at Gold. Gold returned the nod. From opposite directions, they ran at Transistrox. They crashed their weapons into the monster, sending up sparks, and kept running to a safe distance. Transistrox stumbled around, smoke and sparks floating off of him.

Red pressed the trigger of the Cannon. "Magnum Blast!" The powerful blast slammed into Transistrox and he exploded, leaving behind a small egg. The egg exploded and a giant Transistrox formed, now with a giant shield as well.

"Ooh. Now I can do this," he said and went toward the alarm pole. "No need to climb!"

"No. I told you that wasn't happening," Red said and the crystal on his gauntlet began glowing. "I'm leaving the Cannon to you, Fox," he said. He pressed the crystal. "Magnum Alpha Megazord!"

From various places around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord

formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. Their pilots were teleported into an enormous combined cockpit except for Black and Electrum. Silver split into two to take their spots.

"That sounded rather ominous," Black muttered to himself. He activated something on her Morpher. "Alphamax Cannon!" The Alphamax Cannon and he teleported aboard.

The Megazord rushed forward and knocked the monster away from the alert system.

Transistrox whirled around, slashing the Megazord with his sword. He held out his shield and blasted him the horns of a fleet of cruise ships. The Megazord stumbled back, while the Rangers within suffered as well.

"Even I heard that," Gold complained.

Black was already targeting the monster. "Target Acquired. Firing!" She depressed the buttons. Two by two, from the outside in the points of the Alphamax Cannon began firing, hitting the monster in succession. Each hit glowed. Finally the middle barrel fired. A beam of blindingly bright light hit. The other ten points connected in a circle and hit.

Transistrox brought up his shield and unleashed another torrent of sound that seemed to counter the Cannon's attack for a time, before it too also crumpled.

Luckily, the Megazord had already righted itself. "Magnum Dino Blast!" Red lined the target up on his screen. He pressed the buttons, the dino mouths come open and their tail whipped up and four points of energy were fired at the monster. They hit, causing massive damage to the monster but he was still standing.

"You can't blame this on me, but I think the Cannon is out of juice!" Black shouted in a panic.

Before Red could reply or anyone could offer up a solution, a bright light swept over them. Everything that was evil it touched disintegrated into dust. Bone Wings, Bone Cruisers and even the monster, all blew away in the rush of energy that briefly covered the city of Angel Grove.

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Electrum tried to heed Rei's warning and protect the out of town Rangers, but the storm of black energy swept over her before she could. She could feel the energy pressing in on her. She vaguely heard Rei screaming somewhere not far away. She figured this was the end of her as her Morph fizzled.

Something strange happened. White light was sweeping through the blackness, turning it to nothing but smoke and then nothing at all.

Rio gasped as a wall of white light blew toward her. She took a quick reading of the energy before she disappeared in a puff of smoke, retreating to the safety of the Moon before she was destroyed.

The white light engulfed everything in its wake. Lammy found Rei, and helped her to her feet. They both looked in amazement at the source of the light. Hovering several yards off the ground, Selena Vega was in the center of the light storm. Her hair, clothes and body hung there as if there was no gravity around her. She suddenly gasped and the light winked out and she fell.

Quen deftly caught her and cradled her in his arms.

Simon sighed and ran his hands through his hair. "Well, there goes our concert," he complained. "It'll be days before she wakes up," he added.

Rei, who'd felt like she was dying only moments ago, now felt more recharged and energized than she ever had thanks to that light, ran over to them. "Amazing," she said, eyes dancing. "The people from your planet must have come from the Mystic Realm. Amazing!" she said again, glancing vaguely at Ryden. "Oh, right. We can help her recover more quickly," she said. She activated her communicator. "Beez, please teleport out visitors to the Command Center. Tell Taran to prepare for an energy exchange," she said. She was still a bit glassy-eyed. "If I feel like this, I can't imagine how he's feeling," she commented to Lammy.

Lammy found herself giggling. "I know, right?" she said. "Is this how you always feel?" she asked.

Rei nodded. "I think so," she said.

"I think Selena made them high," Simon whispered to Marcy. Moments later they were in a completely different location. "Nope, that's me. I'm the one that's somehow high," he corrected as he looked around.

"Nah. That was just the teleport," Danny corrected. "Welcome to the Command Center," he said.

"Where's Selena?" Quen demanded, looking around. The two strange women were gone as well.

"This way, please." Holo-Beez beckoned. She led him to the Medi-Lab.

Selena lay on a Medi-Bed. Rei was placing crystals around her.

Autumn was sitting on another bed with a blindfold over her eyes. The bright light had been beautiful, but it affected her aura reading unduly. She couldn't look at anyone it'd touched without feeling like the world was lurching. She felt quite nauseous. Looking at Taran was worse than anything. She'd nearly puked on him. It made her sad.

"What are you doing?" Quen demanded.

"It's okay. We're going to transfer some of the energy she exerted back into her," Rei said with a too bright smile. "This is Taran. He's a powerful white mage but he's still in denial at the moment," she said.

Taran's head was swimming. He managed a vague wave and a grin. "Can we get this over with soon? I feel like I'm about to float off and I don't even care," he said.

"Just sit and watch," Rei prompted Quen. He refused to sit, but he did watch closely as Rei led the two



blond siblings in running beams of white energy through the crystals which created some sort of white blanket of energy over Selena. He settled in to wait awhile.

Ryden had watched Quen go to Selena, but he didn't budge. He was looking for whoever was in charge. As it happened, the one in charge was moving toward him. Ryden had always disliked that Quen and Simon were taller than him. This guy made it a lot worse. "You must be Ryden. I'm Tai," he said. He was just the right mix of friendly and authoritative. Ryden already liked him.

"And I'm Lani. Sorry about this mess. We were looking forward to the show. We all had tickets," said the cute girl who'd come in Tai's wake. She waved vaguely at the room full of Rangers. Marcy and Simon were already in their midst, chatting with several of them and laughing as introductions were being made.

"It happens. There will always be someone who wants to use the Light for evil," Ryden said. "Thank you for wanting to come to the show," he added.

"But why are you guys having the show in Angel Grove?" Wood suddenly asked.

"Ah that," Simon gave a disgruntled pout.

"The CPAF freshman exhibition counts as our final exam. We're kind of the underdogs on campus. We were...um, blacklisted from any venue within fifty miles of campus. Angel Grove was the nearest venue we could afford," Marcy explained sheepishly.

"So college isn't any different than high school. Fun," Billie grumbled.

"Basically," Simon agreed.

"That magicky stuff will take awhile if past incidents are any indication. You guys are welcome to wait it out at the Youth Center," Winter invited.

"We'll take you up on that. I feel like we're using someone else's swimming pool while they aren't home," Marcy said.

"I'll teleport you," Beez said.

Ryden nodded. "Quen will keep us updated on Selena's condition. Plus I'm hungry and I've heard the Youth Center in Angel Grove has the best French fries," he said.

"That they do," Manny said and offered Ryden one of her best smiles. It was effective. Ryden found himself returning the smile.

Tai nodded. "Okay. People need to clear out anyway," he said. "Except the people who can figure out what happened to the Alphamax Cannon," he added.

Holly set her mouth. "I wasn't planning on going anywhere until I did just that," she declared. "You don't have to stay though," she told Danny.

Danny was torn. The Alphamax Cannon was his design. If something went wrong, he needed to figure out what. On the other hand, he wanted to hang with Simon for awhile.

"Just go," Lani told Danny. "Holly has that look," she said.

Holly did have that look. While Danny might have designed the Cannon and done most of the work, it was Holly who maintained it and kept it working properly. "It was nice meeting you," she said and smiled at Simon then stalked off to the Blue Lab.

Simon jostled his cousins shoulder. "Nice catch," he said, referring to Holly. That earned him a quick smack from Marcy. "Ok, let's get to the Youth Center," he said.

Beta Z began teleporting their visitors and other Rangers left on their own accord.

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### **Palace on the Moon**

Zita was waiting for Rio when she returned to the Moon. She felt more clarity and less anxiousness than she had in quite some time. She gave her cousin a smile. "Lovely light show," she said.

Rio sneered. "Don't push it, coz," she growled.

Zita gave a dainty shrug. "I could say the same of you. I'm not Rei either. Unlike her and Moriko, I am the one who's retained my years of extensive magical and physical training. You only thought Lammy was tough," she said. She felt more like herself than she had since Moriko separated from her. "Your mother is waiting for you in the throne room," she said as she leisurely walked to her room.

Rio glared at her retreating figure. She stomped toward the throne room. Ria looked up when she came in. "Though it was foolish of you to attempt that particular spell, we succeeded in eliminating that power. It was not a fragment of the Soul Stone. Powerful yes, but not what we want," she said.

Rio nodded but she seethed. Her mother had no idea how close her daughter had come to dying, or worse, being turned Good. She shuddered at the thought of it. "What was it?" she asked.

"I don't know and I don't care. It's time for find our next lead," Ria said decisively.

Rio nodded. "I'm going to rest first," she said and stalked out of the throne room. Ria barely noticed her go.

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The Angel Grove Municipal Auditorium found itself a victim of shattered window syndrome. This distressed Simon somewhat. "Don't worry, happens to my brother and me all the time," Autumn had assured him. Her vertigo was under control now that the glow of powerful white energy was fading from everyone.

Back to her not-at-all-chipper self, Lammy had quickly and quietly repaired the windows. The other Rangers helped with some street clean-up.

Channeling a generous amount of energy back into Selena had revived her enough to perform at the Freshman Exhibition. It went off without a hitch. The audience was given surveys to complete which were collected by a CPAF professor after the show.

Project Lumina was preparing to leave the next day when Danny and a few of his friends came to see them off. Wood and Nathan, who were both more than slightly interested in eventually attending CPAF were peppering them with questions. Danny and Simon shook hands and gave each other bro hugs. Chloe just bounced up and squeezed the breathe out of him.

"Come back by anytime. We'll try and make it less exciting," Danny said.

"Plus Ma was all, 'Why couldn't Simon even have dinner if he was in town. Didn't Mary teach that boy any manners?'" Chloe added, doing a fairly decent impression of her mother.

Simon groaned. Their moms were sisters and none of them were sure if they loved or hated each other.

"We should go," Ryden said. "Tell Tai we'll warn him next time we're in town," he said.

"Will do. Have safe journey. Though I ain't sure if you're gonna be able to pry Tori and Selena apart," Danny added, nodding toward the two girls who were giggling together like old friends.

"I leave things like that to Quen," Ryden said and went around to the driver's side of the van they and their equipment were traveling in.

As in on cue walked over to the two girl, mumbled something to Tori with an apologetic air, then stooped down and hoisted Selena over his shoulder. Tori gaped and then began to giggle. Simon and Marcy took that as their cue and bid farewell to their new friends and loaded into the van.

And with that, the Light left Angel Grove.

"A'ight. I'ma go. I think I know what to do about my Cannon," Danny declared and teleported. Chloe rolled her eyes.

She swept up the other three and herded them toward the Youth Center. "Let's go give Fox some backhanded compliments because he was actually kind of cool the other day but we can't let him think he was," she declared with a grin.

"I'll let him know he was cool," Tori said.

"You're just no fun," Chloe sighed. Nathan and Wood snickered at the bickering best friends and let them argue as they walked along,

-xThe End Chapter 21x-

## 22 - Catch

A blow to the chest sent Rei flying through the air and crashing into the ground. She coughed and tried to regain her breath. She fisted her hands and hit the ground beneath her. She shook it off and sprang to her feet only to immediately go into a defensive stance as her opponent launched another attack at her. It was all she could do to keep up with the barrage. Then she remembered something Zita learned. That little tidbit came creeping out of the murky recesses of memories of being joined with her sisters.

Instead of blocking, she turned slightly for better leverage, and drove her fists into her opponent's wrist, elbow and shoulder. Turning with her momentum, she drove her elbow in between her opponent's shoulder blades. That's when it all went wrong. She let down her guard. Her opponent grunted in pain and went down. Just as quickly she twisted her body, and trapped Rei's ankle between her feet and jerked her down.

Rei yelped as she went down. "Can I tap out now?" she moaned. Her whole body felt like one big ache.

Lammy sat up, crossing her legs in front of her. "That last move wasn't one of mine. I was impressed," she said.

Rei slowly sat up as well. "I think it was one of Zita's," she said as frowned at a tear in her pants. There was a scrape on her knee. She grimaced.

"You also have one on your chin," Lammy said unhelpfully. Rei just glowered with a pout. Lammy got to her feet. She held her hand down to help Rei up. "You're improving at a good rate. Maybe next time you decide to take on Rio, you won't get stomped so thoroughly," she said.

"Your encouragement lights up the world," Rei declared drily. She wiped the sweat from her forehead. She knew, however, that it was actually high praise from Lammy.

"Isn't this why you asked for my help instead of Sora's or anyone else's?" Lammy asked. She waved her hand and seemed to grab at the air and pulled. The two of them popped out of the pocket dimension they'd created and landed in the middle of Lammy's apartment.

Rei stretched her sore muscles. "Yep. Anyone else would go too easy on me. Except Tai, but he scares me more than you do," she said. "Plus he's busy with Fox," she added.

Lammy raised a brow. After a moment of thought, she nodded. "Yeah, he'd give that look all the time, wouldn't he? The one that says he's an inch away from strangling you but won't because he's better than that."

"Yes! That's what that look is!"

"I wonder if he gave Mina the Queen of Evil that look while he was training her," Lammy mused.

"I don't think even she would have been spared that look," Rei said. "Oh, it's almost time for my shift. I'd better get back and get cleaned up," she said. "Thanks again!" she said and poofed out in a cloud of white smoke.

Lammy coughed and waved it away. "They never think about people left behind when they do that," she complained. "Get out here and tell me why you dropped in," she said, glancing at her sofa.

A large black scorpion scurried out from where he was hiding and changed into her brother. He was wearing his human disguise of biker boots, ripped jeans and a dark hoodie. "I need your help," he said.

"You still haven't found Finster? You? You tracked a Hypaxion through the endless moving sands of Qonsuqor. They don't have feet and the sand moved endlessly," she said.

"There's a reason we made such a good team. I know that he was taken by Bone Drones, but there's no trace of him anywhere," he said. "I wouldn't ask you, conflict of interest and all, but Mori is really worried. I hate not being able to tell her anything," he admitted.

"Aww, look at my little brother, all in love and cute," she said and pinched his cheeks.

He grimaced and knocked her hands away. "I was born first," he grumbled.

"We probably should have cleared that up with Mom and Dad before they left," Lammy murmured. "All right, share everything with me. I'll see what I can do," she said and reached up again, this time putting her fingers on his temple and establishing a mental link with him to learn all she could about Finster's disappearance from what he knew.

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## **Moon Palace**

Moriko joined her sister on a terrace overlooking the Earth. Zita stood pensively, her arms crossed her chest, the fingers of one hand drumming on her opposite upper arm. "We need to figure out what they're looking for," she declared.

"Is that what your magic cherry trees told you?" Mori asked.

Zita pursed her lips and gave her sister a sideways glare. Mori just raised her eyebrows innocently. "No. It's what I realized myself. Neither dearest Aunt Riti nor Rio seem like the types to abide by the edicts of the Blood Rights," she said and rubbed her chin thoughtfully.

"Well, you know what they say; 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.' Oh, and the good old 'Blood is thicker than water,' nugget," Mori said and eased away from her sister as she processed what she was getting at.

Zita whirled toward Mori. "Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?" she demanded.

"I'm saying there are *three* of us and someone went so far as merging us into one being so there would no longer be three of us," Mori said calmly enough. It felt strange to be the voice of reason, but someone

had to do it.

Zita scowled and turned away. She glared at the Earth. "Then we propose a temporary truce, but once we are rid of the Reviles, everything goes back to how it was," she declared bitterly.

Mori tipped her head. It was a start. "Very well," she said. "Where should we start?" she asked.

Zita drummed her fingers again as she stared at the Earth. "See if Rei, through her shiny suited friends, know anything about what Riti and Rio are after," she answered. "If not, we'll devise a plan for finding out through nefarious means," she said and her mouth stretched into an evil smile.

Seeing her sister was in better spirits than she had seen in a while, Mori decided to leave her to scheme in peace. She walked back into the Palace. She'd pop in on Rei in a little while. She wanted to see what the Reviles were up to, but neither seemed to be in the Palace. That was strange. She poked her head into the Hatchery. There were as many eggs there as before, so they weren't currently attacking the Earth.

She harrumphed but disappeared to find her other and talk to her.

-x-

Billie, Billy and some of her friends stood along a running track in the middle of the desert, timing Manny's speed at various distances. She just crossed the finish line at 500kmat a much faster speed than she'd previously experienced. It was slightly unnerving. In fact, she hadn't exactly been able to stop as sharply as she'd hoped and had finally come to a standstill almost half again the distance. She looked around, confused and glanced over her shoulder. In the distance, Dr. Bill and Billie were flagging her down.

She carefully jogged back toward them. She'd actually requested the tests because she was becoming concerned about a few instances of accidentally speeding in school or around other people.

Billy was frowning. Billie was frowning too, but Billie was always frowning so that didn't tell Manny much. Billy, on the other hand, wasn't much of a frowner.

"That expression doesn't look good," Lani remarked.

"I don't think it was," Tai said. Even he could tell that Manny's speed has increased exponentially.

"If we wanted her to be faster, it'd be a good thing," Billie said unhelpfully and made a note on a clipboard she was carrying. She announced the time. "Which was even faster than the 100km run, so it seems the more you move the faster you get," she explained.

"The problem comes with the lack of control," Billy said. "We'll head back to the Medi-lab and run a few tests. I don't know if this is a natural bi-product of the Dino Coin or some outside influence. We'll also have to document anything unusual you may have been exposed to lately," he said.

Lani and Manny shared a quiet look.

"Even as socially inept as I am, I could read that atmosphere," Billie stated.

Tai raised an eyebrow at them. "Are we missing something?" he asked.

"Well, this might count," Manny said and held up her wrist. Wrapped around it was a slim powdery yellow spiraling bracelet with beautiful and intricate designs carved into it. "Uncle Carlos gave it to me for my birthday last week. He said he got it at a marketplace in the Rings of Akhaten. He said he had to trade his first GPD badge for it," she explained. She thought it was very beautiful but realized it was of alien origin.

"Yeah, that would probably count," Billie said drily.

Billy ignored his assistant's sarcasm. "Do you mind if I run a few tests on it?" he asked. He knew that just because it was alien, didn't immediately conclude that it was somehow affecting her genetic abilities. Then again, there was always the probability.

Manny shrugged and attempted to remove the bracelet. It wouldn't budge. It was loose around her wrist but it wouldn't come off. "Uh-oh. This can't be good," she said and tugged on it with greater strength.

"Let me try," Tai said with concern. Manny held her Arm out and braced herself. Applying steady pressure with his preternatural strength, he couldn't get the bracelet to come off either. "This is beyond not good," he declared.

"Looks like we'll have to do tests with the arm attached," Billy declared.

"We could always cut her hand off," Billie suggested.

Lani blinked. "Without Danny or Nathan around to give us cues, it's hard to know if she's joking," she said.

"We'll give her the benefit of the doubt and say she's joking," Tai declared. Billie scowled at them, disgruntled and didn't say more.

"Unfortunately, it's not beyond the realm of possibilities should this become dangerous. We should return the Command Center immediately," he suggested.

"Good idea. The sooner we figure this out the better. Preferably without me losing a hand," Manny said.

"Don't worry, we'll make you a new one. No one would ever know," Billie said and teleported before anyone would speculate on the intention of her words. The others followed suit.

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### **Palace on the Moon**

Riti and Rio showed back up on the moon in full force. They had the Bone Drones busy constructing something on the look-out for over a week. No matter how much Zita pestered them, they wouldn't reveal what they were so diligently looking for. They would only reveal that the device they were building would help their search and that when they were done, they'd be out of her hair for good.

Zita didn't trust them as far as she could throw them. She sought out her sister after a not so pleasant run-in with them. She found her with Griff. She actually hadn't seen him much the past week either. They were ensconced in the dining room where Griff was, unsurprisingly, stuffing meat in his face. She quickly threw up several anti-eavesdropping spells. Griff raised a brow at her. "It's been long enough. Have you spoken with Rei?" she asked.

"She doesn't know either. There have been many magical objects brought to Earth over the centuries.

Any of them could be what they're looking for or none of them. But whatever it is, it's doubtlessly powerful for them to so diligently search for it," Moriko said.

"They're looking for a piece of something called a Soul Stone," Griff stated.

Zita narrowed her eyes at him. "How do *you* know that?" she demanded.

"And why didn't you tell us sooner?" Mori asked.

Griff shrugged. "Didn't realize it was something secret. They weren't quiet about discussing it. Of course I was a scorpion at the time trying to hear something about Finster," he said.

Zita stewed over that information. "How is that going?" she asked since she was also worried about Finster's sudden disappearance.

Griff was quiet a moment. "I have a lead. It's not going to be easy to follow up on," he said.

"Can you be any vaguer? I almost understood what you were talking about," Zita said sourly.

"Although I wouldn't have put it quite that way, Griff, sweetie, can you be more specific?" Mori asked after giving her sister an admonishing glance.

Griff sighed. "I asked Lammy for help. She's the best trans-dimensional tracker in existence. She tracked," he stated.

Zita narrowed her eyes. "Your goody-two shoes Power Ranger sister helped you track down my evil monster making minion?" she asked, disbelieving.

"Family does," he said with a shrug.

Zita huffed. "Do what you must, just bring him home," she said. "I'm going to find out what I can about this Soul Stone," she declared.

"You'll share info, right? There's a truce for the moment, right? Right?" Mori reminded her pointedly. Just as pointedly. Zita ignored the question as she swept out of the dining room. Mori sighed. Griff shrugged and went back to eating. Despite what Zita thought of his eating habits, this was the first time all week he'd had the chance to sit and eat a full meal. Interdimensional tracking wasn't exactly easy, even with Lammy helping out.

Mori watched him for a moment. "What aren't you telling Zita?" she asked finally.

"It'd've just peeved her off more than usual," he answered. "They have their entire kingdom hidden in a pocket dimension on the dark side. Not only do they have a gigantic space castle, but also an entire fleet of attack ships. They have no intention of leaving Earth to her or Roki," he answered.

Mori nodded. "That would have ticked her off," she agreed. "Finster's in their stronghold?" she asked.

"Lammy and I are trying to formulate the best way to go about getting in and getting Finster out," he answered.



"If you need help, you know how to find me," she said with a wicked smirk.

Griff wiped his hands and mouth on a napkin. He was unusually quiet and serious for a moment. "No. I don't want you anywhere near that. Besides, I think you may have your hands full here pretty soon. The equipment they brought in came from a recently decimated society of scientists. They were technologically advanced, but peaceful. I think they'll find what they're looking for soon," he said. She processed that quietly. She was torn between immediately going to talk with Rei or, she glanced at Griff, spending some quality time with him. As if thinking the same thing, he shot her a smile. That made up her mind quickly. She stood and held out a hand. With a smile, he stood and took her hand and they left the dining room together.

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Meanwhile, Riti and Rio made the final connections on the device they were building. "I think your dear nieces are plotting something," Rio remarked as she plugged something into the eye-piece of the telescope that looked out over Earth.

"Let them. Once we have the Soul Shard, there will be no stopping us," Riti declared. She grinned wickedly. "Is the device ready?" she asked her daughter.

"Ready. Conquering the Emagineerians was a brilliant idea," she said. She picked up a device not unlike the remote activator of a camera. She pressed a button. The equipment whined loudly as it powered up. Suddenly a brilliant purple light flashed from the lens of the telescope. It lasted for several minutes before blinking out. After another few minutes, the equipment went quiet.

Anxiously, the Reviles rushed to the war room. Zita's map of Angel Grove was now superimposed with a purple image. Several bright spots lit up. Rio scowled. "I don't understand," she said. "That wasn't there before," she declared.

Riti suddenly smiled. "I understand. I want you to attack this spot," she said, and gestured to a mobile spot that was glowing a little brighter than several other bright spots.

Rio nodded "I'll get it done," she said. She held out her hand and her hat appeared. She put it on and disappeared.

Riti gazed at the map triumphantly. It wouldn't be long now.

-X-

### **Command Center**

Danny came running into the Blue Lab and skid to a stop beside Billie. He shoved a clipboard in front of her face. "I know you tryin' to figure out if Manny's gonna run herself into a time vortex or somethin', but you gotta look at this," he said.

Billie jerked her eye back as her eyes crossed. "Blah, don't do that," she said blinking. She took the clipboard from him. "This is the results of the diagnostics from the Alphamax Cannon. Why are you showing it to me?" she asked.

"Because, it's based in part on Morph Tech, which means, when it travels through the Morphing Grid to appear where we need it, it gets power via these scoops," he explained, showing her a different page with a diagram of the Cannon. "That ain't the problem. The scoops are functioning properly. Read this and tell me what exactly that means," he said, flipping a few more pages and pointing at a particular section of the printout.

Billie sighed and read the passage. She blinked and read it again. Then she read it again. She looked at him.

"Does it mean what I'm thinkin' it means?" he asked. His face was pale. The fact that her face was equally as pale was not a good sign.

"This is bad. This is very bad. We need to talk to Dr. Bill. Right now," she said firmly. Just then, alarms went off. The two of them ran to the Power Chamber. "What now?" Billie demanded.

Beez was looking at a view screen. Angel Grove was washed in a purple light. "What the frell is that?" Danny demanded.

"Angel Grove is being bombarded with Gogglitz radiation. The origin of the beam appears to be the moon," Beez reported. "It is not harmful to living things, but I cannot fathom what the purpose of the radiation could be," she said musingly.

"Well, all this time, the crazy purple-headed panda chick has been looking for something. Does this Gogglitz radiation work anything like an X-Ray?" Billie asked.

"As a matter of fact, it does," Beez answered.

"Well, let everyone know that the beam wasn't harmful, but we should be ready. I get the feelin' they'll be acting on whatever information they just gathered," Danny said.

"Then get Dr. Bill to the Blue Lab. We have another problem," Billie said and tromped back to the Blue Lab. Danny sighed and rubbed a hand over his hair. He went to the Zord lab to devise an alternate method of powering the Alphamax Cannon.

-x-

Tai was gassing up his car at a service station. As he propped against a shiny red fender, he somewhat zoned out. That was until a profusion of brightly colored silks and satins caught his attention. A soccer mom SUV had pulled in a few pumps down from him and its occupants exited. All the satin and silk was his girlfriend, her dad and brother dressed in traditional Korean hanbok. Lani's hair was pulled back away from her face and braided until it nearly hit the back of her knees. Her mouth dropped open when she spotted him. Noa ducked his head and tried to hide his face behind his tall black mesh hat from which a strand of beads hung. He quickly disappeared into the store to pick up a few snacks and pay for the gas his dad was pumping.

Tai couldn't stop staring at Lani in her traditional clothes. She colored and approached him. "I don't suppose I can convince you to pretend you aren't seeing what you're seeing?" she asked hopefully.

He shook his head. "You look amazing," he practically blurted. He cleared his throat and straightened.

He took the nozzle out of his car and put it back on the pump. "So what's all this?" he asked.

Lani sighed and ran a hand over her purple satin skirt. "It's Heritage Day at the Koreatown Cultural Center," she answered. "My brothers and I will be performing on traditional instruments. Before I got my first drum set, I was made to learn to play the gayageum. Since we lived in Hawaii, Dad always thought it was important we also embrace our Korean heritage aside from martial arts," she explained and shrugged. She was really pleased that he thought she looked amazing.

Tai nodded. "You don't need to justify it to me," he said and smiled. "Can I come? I wasn't doing anything in particular. I was thinking about going and breathing down Billie's neck but that can wait," he said.

Lani snickered. Before she could answer, the air around them turned purple. "Oh, this can't be good," she said quietly.

After a few minutes the purple faded. Beez sent a message that assured them that the purple haze wasn't harmful, but they should be on their guard anyway.

Mr. Lyong cleared his throat to get Lani's attention. "Time to go. Pua and Keoni will already be there. She invited you, didn't she, Tai?" he asked proudly.

"I wouldn't miss it, sir," Tai assured him with a smile. Mr. Lyong nodded and hustled Lani back into the SUV and they drove away. Tai wasn't far behind them. He was unsurprised to find that Manny and Holly were waiting around for Lani. Manny kept tugging at the bracelet on her wrist and moving slowly with purpose.

A loud chorus of giggles from a surprisingly large group of young women drew their attention. They were all whispering and jostling each other and looking at Lani's brothers, Noa, having joined up with Pua and Keoni. Lani covered her face. "So embarrassing," she declared.

"That would be the curse of having three hot older brothers," Manny said with a weak grin.

Lani gagged. "You'd think things like that only happen in dramas but look. It's enough to make a person sick," she said. She smiled when Tai approached. He'd been finding a decent parking place for his car, then he helped her dad bring in her gayageum.

"This thing is almost as tall as I am," he said, wondering how she managed to lug it around when it was actually more accurately nearly as long as she was tall.

Before Lani could answer another burst of titters erupted from the girly group. They'd finally noticed Tai. Lani scowled at them.

"Hey, that's not fair, those are our fangirls," Noa complained good-naturedly. Keoni didn't comment, but Pua glared at Tai.

"You can have them. Tai doesn't need them. He has me," Lani declared. Manny and Holly dissolved into a fit of giggles while, Tai's ears turned red and he tried to look inconspicuous. Luckily he had to move aside for an elderly woman. She eyed him disapprovingly.

"*Why aren't you properly dressed, young man?*" she demanded.

Tai smiled benignly. "Sorry, ma'am. I'm Irish," he said. Though, thanks to his grandfather he spoke fluent Japanese, he also had a passable understanding of most other major Asiatic languages. The old woman just harrumphed and stomped onward to find a place to sit in the fold-up chairs arranged around the hall.

"Oh, for a convenient monster attack," Lani grumbled when the director of the Center signaled her that it was time for them to set up. She took her gayageum from Tai and went to join her brothers on the make-shift stage. Tai and the two girls took seat near the back.

Halfway through the performance of the Lyong siblings, someone entered the center. She took an empty seat next to Manny. She wore pink and purple hanbok embroidered with bamboo leaves and panda bears. Manny noticed the sleeves first. She allowed her gaze to travel up. Hair pulled back in a long purple braid, red glasses perched on her nose Rio grinned. "Isn't the music lovely?" she chirped.

Before she could stop herself, Manny travelled from her seat to across the auditorium in a blink, so startled was she. Tai was up out of his chair an instant later. People around them shushed Rio. This did not make her happy. "Don't shush me! I was going to wait 'til the performance was over, but never mind now!" she declared and flung out a hand. Chairs, with people in them, went sliding out of the way. "I'll take that bauble of yours," she said to Manny.

"You can have it if you can get it off," Manny said, and held up her wrist tauntingly.

Tai stood between them. He made a motion at Manny indicating her silence. Of all the times to be without his sword. "Get out of here. The Power Rangers should be here soon," he said loudly.

Rio threw her head back and laughed. "Yes. They should be here soon," she agreed. "But nobody is going anywhere right now." She waved her hand and all the doors of the Center slammed closed. She snapped her fingers and her appearance changed to her usual military style outfit. "Mother, send me a present," she said aloud. "This should be interesting. What, oh, what will the Power Rangers do if they can't get in the building where a monster is trapped with a lot of civilians?" she asked, staring Tai straight in the face challengingly.

-x-

### **Moon Palace**

Riti grinned and swept toward the Hatchery. She sized up the remaining four eggs in their incubators. "This one," she directed the Bone Drones manning the Hatchery. They very carefully loaded the egg into the hatching machine. When they closed the door, she tapped a few instructions into the interface and pulled the lever. She laughed as the egg was sucked up into the pipe. It was then launched to Earth. She rubbed her hands together. "Keep those Rangers occupied, my dear," she said. "Stand by," she said to the bone drones. A whirlwind of black energy made her disappear from the moon.

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### **Command Center**

Someone in the Cultural Center managed to activate their distress beacon. Billie's talk with Dr. Bill was interrupted by the alarms going off. They made haste to the Power Chamber and met up with Danny.

"What seems to be the emergency, Beta Z?" Billy asked.

"Rio Reville has appeared at the Koreatown Cultural Center and has civilians, along with Tai, Lani, Manny and Holly trapped inside," Beez answered even as she was contacting the others to report to the Command Center.

"Wait, Tai *and* Lani are trapped inside? Who's in charge now?" Billie asked.

"Are you tellin' me, my girlfriend is trapped somewhere with that maniacal bi--"

Billie cut Danny off by putting a hand on his arm. "She's with Tai, Lani and Manny," she reminded him. Danny nodded. "So we gotta be smart about this," he said. "They can't morph or anything in front of those people. We gotta be quick," he said.

"I get the feeling it won't be as easy as busting down the doors and letting everyone out," Billy said thoughtfully.

"It certainly won't be. My guess would be magical barriers are in place," Rei declared. She and others were arriving at Beez's summons.

"So our main goal will be getting in and getting past whatever other obstacles are in our way," Taran said. "If it's magical, Lammy and Rei will be our best assets," he said, addressing the crowd.

"And you," Rei reminded him.

"Right," he agreed.

"Won't it be kind of weird if we all show up en masse without our Reds?" Fox asked.

"It's a risk we'll have to take. It might not matter if the others are forced to Morph," Lammy said. "I have to give it to Rio. She's diabolical," she said sourly. She fisted her hands. "Let's just do this," she declared and twisted her wrists.

"I'm with you," Danny agreed and twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time!"

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The egg sent from the moon crashed through the roof of the Cultural Center and landed, breaking apart to reveal a black skinned monster with a large red eye with a black center. "Oh, mistress, look at all the lovely young masters," he trilled and clasped his hands under his chin, sighing in appreciation even as the civilians around him reacted with fright. None of them could move from their seats, however. The only people mobile were the three Rangers, Holly and Lani's brothers.

Rio smiled. "I see them, Pangun. Which one is your favorite?" she asked.

Pangun pranced over to Keoni and grabbed his chin. "I like this one. He has pretty eyes," Pangun said breathily. Keoni tried to jerk his head away, but Pangun tightened his grip. "Now, now, now. Be nice or I'll scoop your eyeballs out and have them mounted," he warned, his voice turning gravelly and deep as he spoke. Lani dug her fingernails into her palm and bit the inside of her cheek to keep from saying or

doing something until Tai gave her the okay.

Rio chuckled and looked at Tai again. "Oh, if only there were Power Rangers here to help that poor boy keep his eyeballs in his head," she said dramatically. She laughed again.

Pua tried to make a move to help his brother, using his own gayageum as a weapon he moved quickly and broke it over the creature's back. This had the benefit of Pangun releasing Keoni, but the draw back was the monster whipping around with a staff and knocking him across the room. "Pua!" Lani shouted, but Pangun held his staff in front of her in warning.

Rio sat down in a folding chair and crossed her legs daintily. She clicked her tongue. "My, those Power Rangers sure are failing, aren't they? Isn't it their sworn duty to protect the innocent and all that crap?" she asked.

Tai gave her the faintest smile. She raised her brows. "Something to say, beanpole?" she asked. "Please, I won't punish you for speaking up. Villain's honor," she promised, not meaning a word of it.

"It's just that you seem to implying that there might be Power Rangers in this very room. If that's true, then they're probably formulating a plan. After all, there are numerous weapons on display all around this room, and I would think that a Power Ranger, being you know, a Power Ranger, would have the ability to use them. Like those swords over there, or the daggers there," he said, gesturing vaguely around the room.

Rio glanced around and nodded thoughtfully. "This is true, young man, but a Power Ranger would have to reveal such knowledge in front of all these civilians," she pointed out.

"That's true, but you've barricaded all the windows and doors with this really dark, murky looking energy. I bet it would be hard to see anything if the lights suddenly went out," he posited.

"That would be true, I suppose, if said Power Ranger could get to a light switch," Rio said conversationally. "Once again revealing his or her identity," she said.

"You got me there," he said.

"Why are you having a conversation with this beast?" Pua demanded on a snarl. His middle hurt like nobody's business but he was otherwise okay.

"Nothing better to do since we appear to be trapped here," Tai answered. He knew it didn't win him any points with Pua to answer like that but he'd basically given up on trying to win points with Pua.

"I like your attitude, beanpole. It's nice to see someone who can graciously accept defeat," Rio said. Pua made a disgusted noise.

Tai shook his head. "No, it's not that, I was just thinking. Doesn't one of the Rangers have super speed?" he asked. "I mean, from news footage on TV and stuff, it looks like she can run really, really fast. What if she was one of the Rangers you think is here?" he asked.

Rio shook her head. "Oh, no. Pangun here is quite the speedster himself. She'd never make it. Even if she made it to the lights or the weapons, she'd never be able to do both," she denied.

Pangun was eager to demonstrate and ran around, appearing beside all the guys present that he liked the look of and pinched their cheeks. "I like this one, and this one, and this one~!" he trilled.

Suddenly the building shook. Rio cocked her head. "Looks like the good guys have arrived. Don't worry though, my Bone Drones will keep them occupied while we continue our little chat. I think I can understand what she sees in you," she told Tai, flicking her eyes at Lani. She stood and walked toward him. She reached out to pat his cheek. "Wanna join the winning side?" she asked.

Tai jerked his head back. Lani fumed. She kicked out her foot and send her shoe flying into the back of Rio's head. "That'll be enough of that," she stated. Rio turned on Lani with a snarl and stomped toward her. Lani glared back at her. "Here's a hypothetical for you," she said. "Suppose that Ranger recently acquired an item that increased her speed ten-fold? Why I bet then, she could not only turn off the light, but get to the weapons and pass them out in a snap," she said and snapped her fingers for emphasis.

Just like that the lights went out and the Center was plunged into darkness. Rio gasped and turned, activating the night vision on her glasses. It was too late. A strong hand grabbed her and threw her at the door. She crashed through, not only taking out the door but her own magical barriers. She sprawled at the feet of a very surprised looking Rei, Gold and Electrum.

People flooded out of the Center, many of the younger people had weapons. Lani and Tai were not among them. Manny was rather proud of that little touch. The Green and Pink Rangers split off the Bone Drone battle to help get the civilians to safety. Though Lani was swept up with her family, Tai stepped out last. "Looks like one of the Rangers got a little peeved off at being held hostage and threatened with the revelation of his identity," he said thoughtfully to Rio, who had regained her feet.

Rio glared first at him, then at Manny. "The bracelet," she surmised grimly.

Manny held up her bracelet-ed arm. The stone was turning gray and disintegrating. It was dust within a matter of moments. She stared at where it used to be. Tai stared at where it used to be. Electrum and Rei also stared at where it used to be. Rei took in so much air when she gasped she could have filled a blimp. "She was never after the bracelet!"

Rio threw her head back and laughed. "Good-bye, Rangers," she said and twiddled her fingers at them. "Pangun! Finish this!" she shouted and disappeared.

"My sisters! I have to--"

"Go!" Electrum shouted at Rei, who also disappeared in a wisp of white smoke.

"I don't know what's going on and I don't like it, but we have to deal with that eye sore first," Tai said about the monster now joining the Bone Drones in the battle. His speed proving to be every bit as much of an advantage as it usually was to Manny. He twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex!"

"Smilodon!" Manny morphed. "I might back be back to normal speed, but it should we enough to keep up with him," she said. "Power Grips!" she summoned her weapons and sped toward the monster. "How about some corrective eye surgery, sweetie?" she said and zoomed in with her Grips.

Pangun blocked with his staff. "I'm perfect the way I am, honey," he responded and swiped at her. She raised her Grips and caught hold of his staff with. He grunted as he tugged on it. This caused what was pretty much a standstill. Her partner took advantage of it. He ran forward and leapt, coming down with the Power Daggers with the full force of that jump. Sparks flew and Pangun shrieked and thrashed.

Electrum and Gold joined the three Silver Rangers after Rio disappeared. "Done with the magicky business?" one of them asked as he slashed a thin sword at a Bone Drone.

"Should I be worried about Rei?" asked the one with the CeratoSword.

"Yes, but this first," Electrum answered as she VelociRapier-ed a trio of Drones coming up behind her brother.

"Right," the Silver with the other thin sword agreed. "Watch yer back, mate. They seem to be after you today," he warned Gold.

Gold grunted when he swung his StegoMace. "I reckon so," he agreed, puzzled. He mentally shrugged it off and got back to it.

The Black Team was actually functioning as a team. They stood back to back. "So, I'm confused. Was the bracelet a Red Herring or a McGuffin?" male Black asked as he slashed at several Bone Drones with perfectly synchronized movements of his Power Blades. Under Tai's tutelage, the weapons felt merely like extensions of himself.

"Does it really matter? Aren't they basically the same thing?" femme Black answered and then put a hole through the center of Bone Drone's chest with her fist. Another's head went rolling with a slash of her Power Axe.

"I'm ashamed to call you my sister," male Blue said disparagingly, whipping his Power Lance around.

"It was a Red Herring. It was never powerful enough for Rio's interest and its effects temporary. We'd just found out when the alarms sounded," an invisible femme Blue explained as she took out a couple of Bone Drones trying to double-team her partner with her Power Sais. She reappeared. Two arrows took out the Bone Drones who'd immediately tried to jump her.

"Thanks for the clarification," male Pink said from his hovering position. He held his Power Bow at the ready

"Thanks for save," she responded.

Femme Pink's helmet popped open and she gave a deafening shriek at some of the Drones. "So cute," she declared and giggled. "Oh no, you don't," she denied and jumped forward, and used her momentum to spin herself around with her Power Fans, becoming a little whirlwind that took out quite a few Drones that were climbing on each other's shoulders to get high enough to take out male Pink.



Femme Green swung her Power Staff, simply trying to keep the Drones off herself. "Doesn't there seem to be an awful lot of them?" she pondered aloud.

Stygian Armored, and wielding his Stygian Blade, Male Green cut down at least four Drones in rapid succession. "Yes," he agreed because he didn't have much time to say much else. The Bone Drones seemed to be especially bogging down their more powerful Rangers, like him, Gold, Electrum, Silver and Red.

"It's part of whatever their real plan is," Red declared. "It's meant to keep us busy!" his words cut off sharply as suddenly a wave of Drones engulfed him and he went under. When the thrashing mass went limp, he summoned enough strength to push them off of him and he saw his partner standing over him with the Power Sword and Power Armor.

"I had to ditch my family at the service station, so stop fooling around, summon your Armor and deal with that," she instructed and pointed at the speedy battle between femme Yellow and Pangun, with male Yellow occasionally getting a lick or two in.

Red sprang to his feet. "Gladly," he said. "Power Armor!" he summoned even as he ran toward the monster. He didn't have super speed, but he'd learned when applying his strength just right, he could summon a burst of speed almost matching Manny's. He activated his shield and crashed into the monster's back. Pangun sparked and staggered. He swirled around wildly with his staff, but the TyrannoSword slashed forward and cut across him with all of the Red's strength behind it.

"Magnum Power Cannon!" femme Red summoned and stood behind the Cannon. When Pangun staggered about, sparking and slashed nearly to shreds, she pressed the trigger. The powerful beam smashed into the monster and he exploded, leaving behind a small egg. When the egg hatched, a giant Pangun grew from it.

"Now I'll have all the pretty young masters I want," he declared. "Catch me if you can, Rangers," he taunted. He began to run around at an incredible speed.

Male Red growled. "I don't want to do it, but I think I'll have to hold him with the Megazord while someone fires the Alphamax Cannon," he said.

"I'll have to man the Cannon," male Blue said. Only he knew enough about how it worked and the ways to get around it if there was a problem.

"I'll man the Megazord. Alone," Red declared.

"But, you can't," femme Red denied.

"You get back to your family," he said.

"You aren't going it alone. Taran and I will be with you," Electrum said firmly.

"That's right," Gold agreed.

"Well, how about we stop leisurely discussing it and get on with it. The monster is headed toward the soccer pitch," male Black informed them.

Female Red huffed. She made a go-ahead motion with her hand toward her partner and teleported so that she could meet up with her family before they missed her.

Male Red pressed the crystal on his gauntlet. "Magnum Alpha Megazord!"  
From various place around the city, Zords began appearing and converged on their location. The Zords began assembling together. The SmiloZord and the MastoZord formed legs and feet. The TyrannoZord formed a torso while the PteroZord and TriceraZord formed arms. A helmeted head turned out of the TyrannoZord. The StygiZord broke apart to form gauntlets, a chest shield and a helmet. The StegoZord, CeratoZord and VelociZord configured themselves in a shoulder mounted dino head cannon system that attached to the back of the shield with a tail. Male Red, Gold and Electrum teleported aboard.

Male Blue activated something on his Morpher. "Alphamax Cannon!" he summoned. His cannon appeared and he teleported aboard. He began fiddling with the controls and made sure he had enough energy. He heaved a sigh when he saw the read-outs. He overrode the safety protocols he'd built in. "Tai, when you catch the weirdo, don't just hold him, push him toward the Cannon," he instructed as he worked.

"Easier said than done," Red declared as he chased the monster.

"We're too heavy," Electrum concluded finally.

"We are," Gold agreed. "I'll disengage the Legendary Zords," he said and activated something at the console. The shoulder mounted dino-head cannon of the Megazord broke apart. They picked up speed, but the monster still out paced them.

"Wait, I have the PteroZord," Red said finally. "Holly, can I access the rocket-propulsion system of the PteroZord?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll remotely access the coding. Give me a sec," came her answer. After a moment, the Megazord shuddered to a stop. Suddenly rocket boosters appeared out of its back and fired. It was a one-time deal and they burned out quickly, but it was enough to catch Pungun. The monster thrashed but the Megazord kept itself latched on, wrestling him back toward the Cannon.

"When I say, now, push the monster forward and get outta Dodge. And we only have one shot at this," male Blue warned them as he aimed the Cannon. "Now!" he said and pressed the firing mechanism.

The Megazord pushed the monster forward. The points of the Alphamax Cannon fired all at once in a blinding, deafening explosion that took out not only the monster, but the Cannon, several empty buildings (Blue chose the location because he knew the buildings were empty) and most of the core of the Megazord.

There was silence as the Power Rangers watched the explosion. Male Blue slumped and held his helmet in his gloved hands. Female Blue stood next to him, and male Pink patted him on the back comfortingly.

"What just happened?" male Red asked, stunned. The Megazord and pieces of the cannon disappeared as Holly collected them from the Command Center.

"There's something we need to discuss with everyone back at the Command Center," female Blue said quietly.

"There's no time for that," Electrum suddenly stated, urgency evident in her voice. "Rei and her sisters found out what the Reviles are up to. Tai, they're trying to break the barrier surrounding your land," she said.

Male Red jerked. "What? Grandpa's there by himself," he said and teleported without actually thinking about it.

"We should go, too," Electrum said, encompassing everyone in that statement. The team didn't argue and they all teleported to Tai's property.

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### **Palace on the Moon**

Rei hadn't returned to the Moon since she'd fled Zita and shadows chasing her the night she separated from her. Yet, when Rio disappeared from the battlefield, she knew it was time to return. There was no time for less direct methods of contacting her sisters. "Moriko! Zita!" she shouted, making her voice unnaturally loud, echoing throughout the entire palace. She stood in the entrance hall and waited.

Moriko and Griff appeared momentarily. Mori's eyes went wide seeing her sister actually there. A disgruntled Zita presently emerged from the library. "Oh, you came," she said only. "Good, saves time," she declared. "Follow me," she declared crisply.

Rei swallowed hard, but fell in step with Moriko and Griff as they followed Zita to the war room. Zita stared at the purple map. "Of course," she said quietly.

"What is it?" Moriko asked. "Did you find out what the Soul Stone is?" she asked.

"I did. It was a powerful crystal used millions of years ago, but it was so powerful, it burnt out anyone trying to use it. It took an entire planet sharing the power to properly wield it. That's how massive its energy was. Of course that presented problems as well, because well, it connected their minds. Billions of minds all crowding into each other heads at all times; they were driven mad. So, it was broken into pieces and scattered across the endless expanses of the universe. Most shards are powerful, but in a lesser way than other powerful items.

"But, two large pieces appear to have been on a trajectory toward one small blue planet. As they traveled, they eventually gathered space debris, metals, rocks, whatever else is floating around out there. Eventually it formed a big enough chunk of meteorite to get drawn into Earth's orbit and crash into the planet, killing almost all life 65 million years ago. This meteorite shattered on impact. Part of this meteorite was found about 10,000 years ago, which drew our mother, but, as you can see, someone else beat her to it and made use of it," she gestured to the map. Fifteen small white dots were clustered

around a particular point in Angel Grove, but also seemed to be moving around.

Rei's mouth dropped open. "The Power Coins were made from metals from the meteorite that killed the dinosaurs," she murmured.

"Hmm. But there was a larger piece still to be found, obviously," Zita said. Somewhat out of the way was a brightly glowing dot a little larger than the others.

"That's...that's Tai's Grandpa's land," Rei murmured.

"The Crystal Caves," Griff said, recognizing the location. "Pretty underground too. But Tai's land has that barrier thing," he said.

"It's weakening. Probably while he was living there under the influence of the Sword of Darkness," Zita said. "Still it should keep Riti and Rio out for a while. By the quiet of the Palace and maniacal laughter I heard a while ago, they're attacking the Rangers," she said.

"But that's why I'm here. Rio disappeared before the fight was over," Rei said.

Zita whirled on her. "What? Why didn't you say so sooner?" she demanded, clutching her arms and giving her a shake.

"You didn't find it strange that I was here?" Rei asked.

"That doesn't matter. We have to go. Now," Zita said and disappeared. Still feeling a little shaken, Rei followed.

"I'm filling in Lammy, go," Griff encouraged Moriko, his face a mask of concentration. Long distance telepathy was extremely difficult.

Moriko kissed his cheek. Awed and giddy that her sisters were working together, she disappeared from the Moon Palace as well. Trying times made strange bedfellows and she had a feeling, things were going to get a lot worse before they could get any better.

-xTo Be Continuedx-

## 23 - Triple-Cross

### Command Center

It was quiet in the Command Center. Holly had appeared and almost immediately sequestered herself in the Zord Lab to prepare for any damage the Zords might sustain. Melody and Zara were watching events unfold in the Power Chamber, wishing they could help with the battle but knowing they could not. Beez was busily doing about twenty-thousand things at once. Billy was in the Blue Lab, his focus on the looming catastrophe the younger Blues had inadvertently discovered. He scraped a hand through his fair hair in frustration.

"You look like there might be a problem," Jason commented as he walked into the Lab carrying a blocky black metallic case.

Billy blinked owlishly at him, then peered at the case. "Let me formulate a guess. Another prophecy?" he asked. Jason didn't answer verbally but the smile he gave was answer enough. "I do not claim to be expert but isn't the cluster of prophecies in recent times nearly unheard of?" he asked.

"Our kids are special," Jason answered with a shrug. "It's an important time. Things are always worse before they are better. It's how things are," he declared and set the case on counter. "This will help. Keep it safe until I need it," he said.

Billy nodded. "I do not recall you being so mysterious," he commented lightly and took the case for safe keeping.

Jason chuckled. "It's in the job description," he said. He checked his watch. "I need to touch base with a few people. I'll be around if I'm needed," he said, gave another mysterious smile and left the Blue Lab.

Flabbergasted, Billy put away the case. "I suppose you know what that is all about?" he asked out loud.

"Not everything but enough. I'd be a useless central computer if I didn't know enough," Beez's voice answered him with a hint of humor. Even in this situation, Billy couldn't help but smile.

-X-

After leaving the Power Rangers to fight an army of Bone Drones and a boy crazy monster, Rio Revile joined her mother on the outskirts of Angel Grove. She stood with her feet planted apart and her hands held out in front of her, channeling dark magic that seemed to hit an invisible wall. So hard was she concentrating, a sheen of sweat. On the other side of the invisible wall stood an old man in brightly colored clothing. "What's with the dwarf?" she asked.

Riti stopped channeling her power and took a breath. "He says he's the protector of this land and will defend it with his last breath if I were penetrate the barrier," she answered and flicked a disparaging glance at the old fart.

Rio leaned in to study the man. She tapped her lip. "He looks familiar," she murmured quietly. She snapped her fingers and straightened. "Ah. He looks like the Red Ranger had been shrunk and pickled!" she declared. "Can he hear us?" she asked since the codger wasn't reacting to her at all.

Riti shrugged. "Who cares? What can this old codger do? Join with me. We should be able to punch a hole in the infernal protection spell if we combine our energies," she said. Rio nodded and took a stance next to her mother.

Finally, Akira spoke. "*Honor dictates I give this final warning. Any breach of property will be met with lethal force.*" His hand floated to a sword hanging at his side. He popped the hilt from its sheath. "*If you've met my grandson, understand that I'm the one that trained him,*" he added, looking directly at Rio.

Despite herself, Rio felt a tremor of apprehension. She had indeed met the old man's grandson. She'd sat across from him in a situation where it would have been normal to show apprehension. She'd held a room full of innocent civilians hostage. She'd brought a monster in and threatened to reveal his identity and that of his female partner and the female Yellow Ranger. They'd reacted normally; fear, apprehension, anger. Especially the little Red girl when the monster threatened her brothers. But not him. He faced her down with a dreadful calmness and even smiled at her in such a situation.

And this old man was claiming to be the one who trained him.

Riti didn't share in her daughter's concerns, having never dealt directly with any of the Rangers. She snorted. "Now, Rio," she said and began channeling her power into a spot directly in front of him.

Mentally shaking herself, Rio began to channel her energy, joining with her mother, but she heard the old man say under his breath, "*You were warned.*"

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Two powerful street bikes purred along the streets of Angel Grove. One was white with shimmery crimson tiger stripes on the gas tank and fenders. The other was a simple green-to-teal gradient in metallic paint. They pulled up in front of the Scott Dojo and parked. A young man in boots, ripped jeans and a dark jacket pulled off his helmet. He had short, almost black hair that fell over his forehead with a slight curl, a striking dark face that bespoke of a Native heritage, and bluish-greenish eyes. He glanced at his travelling companion. "Your brother and sister are expectin' us, right?" he asked in a Texas drawl.

AJ Scott removed his helmet. "They probably would if I'd told them when I was coming. I just mentioned in passing that next time I came I'd be bringing a friend. What're they gonna do, lock us out?" he asked as he untethered his saddle bags and draped them over his shoulder.

Damien Henderson closed his eyes and asked for patience. With a sigh, he slung his own saddle bags over his shoulder. "What is that racket?" he asked, finally becoming aware of the WWII air-raid siren style blaring sounding around the city.

"Monster alert sirens," AJ answered, unfazed by the sound. He glanced around and pointed. "Monster battle," he explained. In the distance they could see a giant monster running around the city with a

Megazord chasing after it.

Damien cocked his head. "Huh, so that's what that looks like," he commented.

"Yep. Welcome to Angel Grove," AJ remarked. "Let's get inside in case the battle moves over this way," he said and walked toward the entrance of the Dojo.

"Yeah, comin'," Damien said and followed his friend after one last glance over his shoulder at the battle in the distance.

-X-

There wasn't some big flashy explosion or anything when the Reviles broke through the protective barrier of the Watanabe lands. They just knew and they stepped through quickly before it rebounded enough to repel them. They were met with the glinting steel blade of Akira Watanabe's blade. No further warnings, no further talk, no further chances were warranted. He drew his blade and attacked. For a man in his sixties he was in good shape. He was often his grandson's sparring partner and he worked the forge still. His skills were as sharp as they ever were.

He sprang forward on a slash. Riti produced a black blade of her own, while Rio summoned her laser gun. She didn't get a chance to fire it, however, the old man was quick and seemed more than capable of keeping her off balance enough to avoid getting a shot off while sword fighting with her mother.

"If that's the way you want it old man, that's how you'll have it," she and threw off her hat. Her gun disappeared and was replaced with a long silver blade. She dove into the sword fight. "Go, Mother! I'll take care of this old prune!" she said.

Riti took advantage of her daughter's distraction of the old man to run for the Crystal Caves. They were little more than a network of old underground caverns behind a rather small waterfall from a tiny mountain stream, but they had shiny crystals imbedded into the walls, which is how they were given such a whimsical name by Akira's young wife. No one suspected they were anything more than a natural anomaly. Certainly, no one could have known it housed the last remaining piece of the meteorite that killed the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Nor embedded within that hunk of meteorite was a shard of the unimaginably powerful Soul Stone.

Rio and Grandpa were deep in battle when the male Red Ranger teleported in ahead of his fellow Rangers. "Grandpa!" he said surprised and concerned. Rio got in a lucky shot and kicked the old man in the side. With her inhuman strength, the ribs cracking was audible.

Red was there was his TyrannoSword before Rio could even think about gloating. His blade slashed across her torso, making her cry out in pain even as she flew through the air. She landed and bounced a few times. Grunting in pain she glared at him. "You're too late. Mother has the Shard," she said triumphantly and painfully got to her feet.

The ground began to tremble. By now the other Rangers had arrived. They all turned to see Riti emerge from the Caves holding a large lump of stone. She broke it open and dropped the two hunks on the ground once her goal was revealed. A bright pink stone about the size of a ping-ball hovered in the air

before her. She cupped her hands around it.

A bright pink glow engulfed her, and she laughed. "There's no stopping me now!" she crowed and in a pink streak of nearly blinding light, she rocketed upwards and disappeared into the sky.

With a smirk, Rio disappeared as well. It was too late for the Rangers now. There was nothing they could do to stop them. There was nothing anyone could do to stop them.

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For the first time in years the Repulsa triplets were together without being fused into a single being. When they found out what the Soul Stone was and where it was located, the three of them immediately went to the cherry trees that stood as the sentinels of Watanabe lands. At once, all three of them gasped. They could tell even without trying that the barrier had been breached.

Almost sadly, Zita reached out to touch the trunk of one of the trees. Only a tired tingle tried to repel her touch. Moriko and Rei touched the tree as well. "The barrier should still work against most threats. I just don't think it sees you as a threat," Rei told Zita.

Zita scowled at her and jerked away from the tree. "We'd better hope it's not too late," she said and started running to where they could feel the presence of tremendous power. Moriko and Rei ran behind her. They stumbled upon the scene just as Riti joined with the Soul Shard and disappeared.

"Well, that is definitely not good," Moriko declared flatly.

"Thank you, Captain Obvious," Zita responded.

"There has to be a way to stop her. There has to be," Rei declared.

Zita rolled her eyes. "Life isn't all sunshine and rainbows. What can we possibly do?" she asked. She gritted her teeth.

Moriko rolled her eyes as well, but this time at Zita. Whatever she was about to say was cut off by the arrival of Grifforzer. "Griff!" She and the Electrum Ranger had noticed his arrival at the same time and both ran toward him.

Griff shook himself and seemed surprised to find himself there. "Where am I?" he asked, looking around. He blinked again. "Power Rangers and you three. Oh," he said quietly. "They expelled me from the Palace," he concluded.

Electrum dropped her Morph. The other Rangers did the same. Tai gave over care of Grandpa to Billie who summoned a 3HD to use on his ribs despite his insistence he'd heal naturally. Though he was mildly interested in finding out who would win the grouch off, Zita appearing with Rei and Moriko on his land was of slightly more interest.

Rei held up a hand. "Before any words are said that no one can take back, it's a ceasefire, okay. Truce," she said before Tai or Zita could say anything.



"Fine," Tai agreed.

Zita was a little less agreeable. "Fine," she finally growled. "What do you mean you were expelled from the Palace?" she demanded of Griff.

"I was in the war room when Riti stalked in. She spotted me, waved her hand and I ended up here," he said. He frowned deeply and crossed his arms.

"That's so not good," Lammy said. Griff may not actively practice magic like she did, but a forced transposition shouldn't have been possible to use on him.

Zita growled and disappeared in a puff of black smoke, only to almost instantly reappear. Shock was written on her face. "No. She can't do that. It's not possible. It's against the Blood Rites!" she howled and disappeared again. This time she didn't reappear.

"What the heck was that about?" Taran asked.

"My guess is that she's been banned from entering the palace," Lammy answered.

"We'll go find her," Moriko said, and grabbed Rei's arm to include her in the "we". "Stay with Lammy. I'll find you later," she said to Griff. With his nod, the two sisters disappeared as well to find their missing triplet.

Tai rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Lammy, Taran, do something with your brother. I want to make sure Grandpa is okay and find Lani but we should meet back at the Command Center in about half an hour. In the meantime, everyone get off my property," he instructed them. He went back to his Grandpa and everyone did as he asked.

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Tai found Lani in her own back yard a while later. She was still wearing her hanbok but she'd taken her hair down and pulled the extension out. She sat in a porch swing. He entered through the back fence gate so that he wouldn't have to go through her family. She smiled when she saw him. "I heard about Grandpa. How is he?" she asked with a little grin. She scooted over on the swing to make room for him.

Tai chuckled and sat beside her. "He's the same as always. I was the one who almost had a heart attack when I saw him dueling with Rio," he said. He scraped a hand through his hair. His usually well gelled spikes were quite askew from continuous assault. "How're things here? Your Dad and brothers?" he asked.

Lani sighed. She leaned against his shoulder. "Dad is both proud of me and Pua for standing up to Rio and outraged at our stupidity for doing so," she answered. "Keoni is a little freaked out that a monster had a crush on him. Noa has been kind of quiet about it. Pua is just angry. It's probably best you avoid him for a while. Dad thinks you were very brave for engaging Rio, but Pua thinks you were, I don't know, on her side or something," she said.

He groaned and shook his head. "Yeah, Pua is never going to like me," he said.

Lani laughed and wrapped an arm around his. "Doesn't matter if he likes you or not. Just matters that I do," she said. "I should go change before heading to the Command Center but Mom is on super-mega Hoover mode. That's why I was hiding out here," she said. "Not sure if I could sneak up to my room or not. Maybe I'll call Manny to bring me something to change into," she said. "How bad are things looking?" she asked.

"Bad enough for Rei and Zita to join forces. Worse than what we know, I suspect. I think the Blues know something else they just haven't had a chance to tell us. Danny didn't blow up his precious Cannon for no reason," Tai said.

Lani looked at him for a long moment. He looked tired and worried. She tugged on his arm. "We still have awhile before we have to be at the meeting. Just lay your head down for a few minutes," she said and patted her lap. "No arguments," she said firmly. Though it was a little awkward, he obeyed her without arguing.

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## **Command Center**

Billie glared over her shoulder at Nathan hovering --not literally-- around the Blue Lab. "Why have you been breathing down my neck this whole time?" she asked him grouchy.

Nathan gave a shrug. "I don't know. Guess I know you're busy but I don't want you to be alone either so I'm trying to be here but not in the way," he answered.

Billie went back to her analyses. "Why shouldn't be alone?" she asked absently.

"Because, even though I don't know what's wrong, you do and you're about to melt down over it. You can't be alone when that happens," he said. "You might kill somebody," he added with a grin.

Billie hit her console with her fists, frustrated. "You might be right about that," she said. "It might even be you," she warned him. But it wasn't him her frustration was aimed at. It was the data.

He nodded. "I'm good with that," he said. He drummed his fingers on his leg. "I'm going away for the summer," he announced suddenly.

Billie paused in whatever else she was doing. She turned to face him. "You're doing what now?" she asked, blinking at him owlishly.

He cleared his throat. "I won't be out of commission or anything. Just, Danny's cousin was able to get me an audition for a summer workshop at CPAC. I made it. But I have to board there for a couple months," he explained.

"Why am I just now hearing about this? Did Wood and Danny know?" she demanded.

Nathan nodded slowly. "Wood auditioned, too. We'll be bunking together. Danny was our go between with Simon. It wasn't that we were keeping it from you, it's just..." he didn't know how to explain it. "I think I thought if anyone else knew, I'd chicken out, or bomb or something," he said lamely.

Billie turned back to her work. "It's nice to know I got lumped in with everyone else," she grumbled under her breath.

Nathan groaned. "That's not what I mean. You know you aren't 'everyone else' but you don't want me say what you *are* so what am I supposed to say?" he demanded suddenly, a rare spark of temper.

"Gosh, you're so stupid. Do think I would ask you not to do something you really wanted to do?" she asked as spun back around to face him.

"No. No of course not. That's not what I mean either. I don't even know what I mean anymore," he said, throwing up his hands.

Billie rubbed her eyes under her glasses. "You're an idiot. A big, dumb doofus. A moron. I wouldn't let you hang around me all summer and squander this chance, a great chance, just because we'll miss each other," she told him, fist on her hips and giving him a disgruntled glare.

"Oh, yeah. That's what I was trying to say," he said and gave her sheepish smile. "Am I really that stupid?" he asked, thinking about it.

"No more than I am," Billie said and sighed. "It's almost time for the meeting and I have to give the rotten cherry for the top of the crap sundae we find ourselves face with," she said and sighed.

He slung an arm over her shoulder and squeezed. "It'll be all right, Glitch. We're a team and we'll figure it out, all of us together. Even stupid ones like us," he said and walked her out of the Blue Lab, and she allowed it.

-X-

Fox wanted to strangle his cousins. Even with doom impending, and a meeting soon, they were forcing him to make a delivery to the Dojo. "Business as usual, Fox," he mocked Autumn under his breath as he hopped off his new black scooter. He opened the storage compartment installed on the back and grabbed the bag within. He paused when he spotted the gleaming motorbikes he'd just parked next to. He let out an appreciative whistle under his breath.

Remembering that he was under a time crunch, he pulled his attention back to the task at hand. He entered the Dojo and immediately headed up to the office. The Dojo staff were regular customers but Randi in particular enjoyed Nana Mai's tuna surprise sub with sweet potato fries. He gave a preemptory knock before barging in. "If you don't mind, Randi, I'm in a bit of hurry so if you could call Autumn and put it on a tab or something so I don't have to waste time making change--er...neither of you are Randi."

The two men in the office were definitely not Randi Scott. Though he recognized her twin brother. He was definitely the only other person he knew that had ever ordered a tuna surprise sub with sweet potato fries. The other bloke he had no clue about, but he sure was eying Fox in a funny way.

"Randi has a tab? Score," AJ said and grinned. He stood up and took the bag with the two Styrofoam containers from Fox. "Yeah, she's not here. I haven't seen her or my brother since we got here," he said.

"We really should pay the shark," Damien said. "Sorry, if it'll hold you up," he added apologetically.

Fox hesitated. Get skinned by Tai for showing up to the big meeting late, or get skinned by Autumn for not getting payment? Those were his options.

Apparently his indecision kept him silent for an inordinate amount of time. "Uh, Fox?" AJ asked, waving a hand to get his attention.

"No, yeah. Just trying to decide who gets to kill me," Fox said and shrugged. He'd throw Autumn under the bus in a heartbeat and let her take all the blame. He looked at the ticket and told them the price. AJ quickly paid him and said to just keep the change. "Thanks, mate," Fox said and prepared to dash out. There was a dull thudding sound and the building shook. Fox closed his eyes. "Please, please, please don't be a monster," he said under his breath.

"Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, sharky, but that appears to be exactly what it is," Damien said. Being nearer to the window, he'd hopped up and looked out.

"Are there egg shells around it?" Fox asked faintly.

"Looks like it," Damien confirmed. "This a common thing in these parts?" he asked.

Fox pressed the distress beacon on his communicator and went to the window to peer out. The monster looked like a pile of half melted old vinyl records but that didn't make his ability vibrate and generate destructive sound bombs any less terrifying. He jumped back when lightning flashed. Dark clouds gathered over Angel Grove. More lightning flashed and thunder rumbled. "Bloody Christ," he murmured.

He darted from the office since now both of the older guys were busy staring out the window. He ducked around a counter and twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Mastodon!" He was moving again as soon he was able. He ran out into the street and skid to a stop. "Power Blades!" He summoned his weapons. He ran forward. He dodged a sound bomb tossed at him and slashed at the monster several times.

Other Rangers began appearing. The male Blue came along with his Power Lance. Female Pink appeared and summoned her Power Fans. Male Yellow leapt onto the scene with his Power Daggers. Electrum came along with her VelociRapier.

"Not quite the back-up I was expecting," Black commented. Usually Tai sent out half the team at first. This was only a third. That didn't bode well.

"Well, this ain't the only ugly to come along," Blue said.

"Riti and Rio are making their move," Electrum said.

"'Cuz that that definitely isn't natural," Yellow added, pointing at the dark sky.

Pink used her Power Fan to deflect a sound bomb. She cried out when it hit and she was knocked off her feet. Yellow leapt over to her. "Tori!" he helped her to her feet.

"Does anyone else's suit feel funny?" she asked. Before anyone could answer, all of their Power Suits began to flicker erratically.

The monster, Kordek, sensed his opportunity. "Whatsamatta, Rangers? Feeling a bit peaky?" he asked. His vinyls began to buzz and vibrate as he gathered the biggest sound energy bomb yet.

"Behind me!" Danny shouted as his suit gave up the fight. He threw up a force-field just as Kordec released the bomb. It exploded around them in a deafening blast. The only way Danny managed to keep it up under the power of the explosion was that Lammy was channeling energy into him. Even so, when it was safe to drop the shield, Danny was wiped. She caught him when he collapsed backwards.

But Kordec was gearing up for another go. He didn't get the chance as two large cats the size of mini-vans roared toward him. The blue-green lion and the white and crimson tiger jumped the monster and practically mauled him.

"I would suggest a hasty retreat while he's distracted," AJ said to the Rangers as he and Damien ran up to them. They watched in some surprise as Lammy easily maneuvered Danny into a fireman's hold and the little group teleported to the Command Center.

-x-

Randi wasn't in the Dojo because she was running errands for her older brother who had been "out of town" again. The monster attack earlier in the day set her off schedule. She'd gone to the cleaner's to pick her and Jason's ceremonial gis for the belt ceremony they were having at the end of the month. She also had to pick up the belts in Little Tokyo and was running behind. Grumbling to herself, she headed to her electric blue electric car.

She nearly collided with Chloe, who was trying to hurry to the cleaners as well. She had to pick up a dress she'd brought for alterations. Her mom was *supposed* to have done it but she forgot. Chloe really wanted to wear it to the Angel Grove High graduation. Now, here she was, riding a bicycle, in a hurry, trying to get her dress before the shop closed and get back in time to head to the meeting. "If only we could use teleports for personal errands," she grumble under her breath. That's how she nearly collided with Randi.

They steadied each other and managed a small laugh. "You look like you're having the same kind of day that I am," Randi commented.

"Youse don't know the half of it," Chloe said and nipped into the shop. Naturally the little old lady who ran the shop had misplaced her dress. Chloe tugged on her braids and made a sound only impatient teenage girls could. Or so she thought until Randi stomped back inside making the same sound.

"When it rains, it pours, huh?" Randi commented drily.

"Youse still don't know the halfa it," Chloe responded. Finally the little old woman returned with Chloe's dress. She paid for the alterations and let Randi have her turn again. Chloe heard her accusing the woman of getting bleach on Jason's red gi. Chloe eased out of the shop before things got really ugly.

She walked to her bike and gently put her dress in the basket. A barely audible *whoomph* shook the ground under her feet. "If I don't look at it, it doesn't exist," she said to herself. "Just get on the bike and pedal away," she added. She knew that wasn't happening, but it made her feel better to voice it as an option.

The sky was darkening even as she was turning around. Just as she expected, a monster had just landed on Earth. Eggshells littered the ground around its feet. It was a pretty horrible one at that. He looked stony with a crooked mouth full of jagged teeth in a weirdly frog-like face. He carried a staff with one end that looked a lot like the double speaker monster sirens. The other end seemed to have fin-like blades. He was whirling the staff in the air and the most grating high pitch whine began to emanate from it.

Chloe twisted her wrists and activated her distress beacon and took her stance even as her ears felt like they needed to pop or she'd keel over. "It's Morphin' Time! Mastodon!" She morphed began running at the monster, "Power Axe!" she summoned.

Ziryroc swung his staff around, and when he'd gathered enough sonic energy, he crashed it into the ground. An underground sonic boom cracked the streets around it and everything sank a few inches. He was gloating when something crashed into his back and send it him stumbling forward. Female Black went stumbling back. It was as if two boulders had collided. The blade of the Power Axe was even dented and she stared at it, aghast.

Ziryroc gave a gravelly disgruntled croak. He started toward her, swinging the other end of his staff at her. Silver Ranger appeared and smacked the staff aside with his gigantic CeratoSword. It went flying out of the monster's hand. Female Green moved in close, and swiped at him with her Power Staff but it felt like she was doing more harm than good. It didn't bode well when all the monster had to do was reach out his hand the staff reappeared in it. He knocked Green aside, and the two Power Sai flying toward him from where female Blue stood.

He began to spin his staff again, but male Red jumped forward and cut his staff wielding hand off with a bone-jarring grating sound of metal on stone. The TyrannoSword gleamed on.

"Thanks for the convenient save," Black quipped.

"Any time," Silver assured her.

"What happened to the Axe?" Green gasped.

Ziryroc staggered around a moment clutching his stump.

"Billie, there's something wrong," Red said suddenly, looking down at his hands.

Blue looked down at her own hands as her power suit began to flicker. "This is the really bad thing I was

going to tell everyone about," she said grimly. Their suits gave up the fight and their morphs failed.

"Ho, ho. Looks like I have the upper hand, now," Zirynoc announced as his hand flew back to his stump still clutching his staff.

Suddenly a dark shape streaked past them, a glint of steel was barely seen. It moved around the monster, crackling with purple-blue electricity before the shape jumped away. A girl in a dark ninja suit with her head and mouth covered landed in a crouch in front of them, a long slim sword held out to the side. Lightning flashed down from the sky and exploded around the monster. "You guys should probably go," she told them as she stood.

"Randi?" Autumn exclaimed.

"Just go!"

"She's right. We should regroup. This isn't the only monster and then there's the really bad thing we weren't prepared for," Tai said with a pointed look at Billie. He gave a nod to Randi the Ninja and the group of Rangers teleported.

-x-

Winter found himself at the airport. He'd been waiting there even before the monster attack earlier. There was a very simple reason he was there alone. He didn't believe his parents would be there. The twins and Fox didn't know that the elder Bakers were expected to arrive. He, Autumn and Nana had discussed it at length and decided not to say anything, especially to the twins. If they didn't show, then there would be no hopes dashed and if they did show, it'd be a great surprise.

His parents were total flakes and had sent an email the night before and said they'd arrive at the airport but couldn't remember if it was eleven, twelve or one. They were certain there was a "1" in the arrival time. This was typical of his parents. Instead looking at the tickets, they chose to be as flighty and vague as possible. So, after leaving Tai's place, he returned to the same spot at the arrival gate he'd previously occupied for the past two hours, passing the time with a handheld game. The fights had almost been a welcome relief.

After checking in with both Autumn and the information desk, he knew there hadn't been an arrival since he'd been gone. A friendly female voice informed them that new flight was now arriving from Brisbane, Australia. Well, that was the flight they were supposed to be on. Win turned off his game and began scanning the people arriving for the familiar faces of his parents. When the last of the straggling passengers disembarked, he gave it up.

He walked to the parking lot, and hunted down Nana's car. He got hopelessly turned around a few times as the lot was vast and shared space with several rental car companies. He finally spotted it when an outer space egg landed on it, the windows exploding outwards. He went intangible as debris passed through him. "Are you kidding me?!" he exclaimed. From the egg was hatched a monster that was a strange amalgamation of a sea creature and a musical instrument. Part of its head was the horn part.

Win twisted his wrists and activated his distress beacon. He took a stance. "It's Morphin' Time!"

Stygimoloch!"

After he Morphed, he summoned his Stygian Armor and was on the move. Saksor saw the Ranger coming toward him. He planted his feet and aimed his face at him and let his horn sound. The sound burst the windows of very car in the lot. Green cried out in pain and collapsed on the concrete, his hands trying to block out the sound with his super powered hearing going haywire.

An arrow to the opening choked up the monster. "You were out of tune," male Pink stated as he lowered himself to the ground. He held a hand down to help Green to his feet.

Saksor burbled and whined as he attempted to extract the bolt from his hole. Female Yellow zoomed in and lashed out with her Power Grips. Unfortunately Saksor's only weapon was not his sound. He also had a wickedly sharp blade that he used to deflect her attacks. He used the other end to trip her when she attempted to speed on. "Oh, you think you're smart, huh?" she said, miffed.

Female Red took her face, thrusting forward with the Power Sword. Saksor deflected and parried and they traded jabs for a time. Finally he kicked her in the middle and knocked her aside. "Oh, wow, he's tough," she gasped, trying to get her wind back.

Saksor's victory was very short lived. He took the StegoMace to the face. He burbled and fell over. He made hacking and grinding noises as he woozily attempted to get up. Gold propped the Mace on his shoulder. But something was wrong. His morph began to flicker. "Anybody else feel that?" he asked.

Red watched the others flicker and looked down at herself. Sure enough, their Morphs petered out.

Saksor finally spit the arrow out and got to his feet, but the Rangers were now defeated. He puffed out his chest and prepared to blow.

A giant lizard, a mottled orange that seemed to flicker with its surrounding as it moved, leapt forward and swatted the monster with its tail. The monster let out a squelchy whine as he flew through the air. He landed and turned to look for his attacker. Instead he met a whip of flame that seemed to be controlled back a small figure in a dark ninja suit. However, she wasn't the source of the chameleon spirit. That had come from a young black guy with close-cut hair and a barely there goatee. "I would suggest a retreat," he said in an accent that sounded suspiciously similar to Ifetayo Kotze's to Taran's ear.

"Right on, mate. We'll take care of this while we can," said the ninja in an Australian accent.

Lani nodded. "Let's go. They seem to a more tactical advantage than we do right now," she said.

"Agreed," Taran said and the little group teleported out.

-x-

## **Command Center**

Three shocked and concerned groups of Rangers returned to the Command Center at nearly the same time. Though there was any number of pressing issues to be addressed, and all of them wanted to know



about them all at once, Tai needed them to be quiet. Taran put two fingers in his mouth and let out a loud, shrill whistle.

Win clapped his hands over his ears. He was still suffering from the blast from Saksor. Lammy went to check on him since Danny was okay to stand on his own. The whistle had its intended effect.

Tai crossed his arms over his chest. "Billie," he prompted.

Billie blanched, but took heart when Nathan came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. She cleared her throat. "Danny actually discovered the problem when he learned that though the Cannon was working properly it wasn't getting enough Grid energy. I don't know how to explain everything about the grid. It's a place but not really. It's like, a film of oil on the surface of reality. Morphing allows us to tap into that by punching through reality into the grid for various reasons. It stores energy, creates things from the energy and lends the energy into reality. When weapons are created and sent into the Grid, they become part of the matrix.

"Anyway, basically our ability to access the grid has been waning drastically the past few weeks and we didn't even realize until Danny began having trouble with the Cannon. It draws on much more energy than our Power Suits and Weapons combined. Tests were inconclusive but we began to suspect the access to the grid would eventually cut off. I have no idea how to reopen the access again. I don't know enough about it," she added lamely.

"Neither do I," Dr. Bill admitted, speaking up for the first time. "It will take some time to go through all the channels necessary to contact the scientists of Eltar," he explained.

"And we got right now problems," Chloe declared, looking at the three different scenes of animal spirits and ninja powers trying to hold at bay three powerful monsters under a darkened sky being monitored on the view screens. "We should be helping," she declared. There was a murmur of agreement with that sentiment.

Tai was wont to agree with her as well, but he didn't get the opportunity to voice his opinion as the Phantom Ranger appeared in the middle of the Command Center holding a large black case. Carlos and Justin appeared as well, other Elder Rangers were beginning to trickle in, all concerned with recent developments. "That will be taken care of. You all have things to do. The bridges to the Grid are closed but they can be reopened," he said.

"If access to the Grid is closed, how are you like that?" Tai asked, raising a brow.

Phantom chose not to answer. "Carlos and Justin have been authorize to temporarily deputize four volunteers to join the Senturion Squad. Not any of you," he added before the current Rangers could volunteer. "Though our allies out there are formidable, they'll need help. The Senturions don't use the Grid," he explained. Justin and Carlos opened a silver case they'd been holding. Inside were four Senturion Squad badges. Before the Galactic Police Department had been purchased by Space Patrol Delta, they'd been expecting to have a whole team.

"Me!" Cassie spoke up, holding up her hand.

"Count me in," Tommy said.

"And me," TJ volunteered.

Kat wanted to volunteer but suspected her nursing skills would come in handier. "Here," Kim spoke up.

Justin and Carlos quickly passed out the badges. "Just pin them to your chest and activate Senturion-Mode," Carlos explained.

"I'll go with TJ to the airport. Tommy and Cassie head to the Dojo. Carlos and Kim can tackle the last one," Justin said. He double-tapped his badge. "Blue Senturion Mode!" A strange network of wires and metallic pieces sprang from the badge and built the Blue Senturion armor around him.

TJ double-tapped the badge he'd been given. "Red Senturion Mode!"

Cassie double-tapped her badge. "Pink Senturion Mode!"

Tommy double-tapped his badge. "Black Senturion Mode!"

Kim double-tapped her badge. "Yellow Senturion Mode!"

Carlos double-tapped his badge. "Green Senturion Mode!"

The Senturion Squad then teleported to the city to help face down the monsters.

"The rest of you should go to the city and help where you can. There will be a lot of injured people and damage to the city. Shelters will also be swarmed," Tai told the rest of the Elder Rangers,

"Unless you're pregnant. Then you go to the Medi-Lab and try not to stress too much," Lani added pointedly at Karone.

Karone started to object, but Kat took charge of her. The two women were growing close. What remaining former Rangers there were began to filter out.

"Not you two," Phantom said when Melody and Zara prepared to go try and make themselves useful as well.

"What? Why? We can do that much," Zara growled.

"Do you mean we get to help here?" Melody asked hopefully.

Phantom but his black case on a console. "That's exactly what I'm saying," he said.

"So, is this the part where you tell us how to fix things?" Fox asked.

"This is the part where I'd say something about prophecies but we'll skip all that. Let's just say they've been worried about something like this happening for a while and have been working on a way to fix it

when it happened. There's only two things powerful enough to fix it. We already have one of them but we have to get the other one," Phantom said.

"What are they?" Lammy asked.

"The thing that we don't have is Zordon's Staff. It's an incredibly powerful object. So much so that when he was contained in his interdimensional-tube, he had Alpha 1 break it into five pieces and hide it across five different times. Each piece only exists in that time. It's well hidden and guarded. Only Power Rangers would have a chance of finding all five pieces and putting them together."

"So, er, what? How do we get to them if they don't exist...now?" Manny asked.

Phantom opened the case and showed them what was within.

"Lego People?" Nathan asked. Within the box was five sets of small Power Ranger shaped figures. Each set represented different teams.

"No offense, mate, but I have plenty of those," Fox said.

"Obviously they ain't Legos," Danny said, rolling his eyes. "But what they are, I have no idea," he added.

"They're Morph Keys. They allow to temporarily access the morphing capabilities of another Ranger. This is extremely dangerous to do because that means the real Ranger of the time period can't access his or her power while you're using it. It's a last resort measure. They'll also lead you to the staff piece. Once you have the piece, you'll return here, to this time and place. If you end up in the past, try not to interact too much. If you end up in the future, try not to learn too much," he instructed.

He took out one set of Keys one at a time and set them on the console before him. "Tori, Wood, Nathan, Lammy," he called out.

Tori grabbed the little figure of a Pink Ranger. Wood eagerly grabbed up the Red Key. Nathan and Lammy respectively took the Blue and Yellow Keys. They winked out of existence in that time and place.

"That's kind of freaky," Fox said apprehensively.

"Fate of the world stuff tends to be freaky," Chloe murmured quietly.

Phantom ignored them and moved on to the next set. "Taran, Chloe, Manny." Taran took the Red Key, Chloe the Pink Key and Manny the Yellow Key. They, also winked out of existence.

Afterwards, there was no more banter. "Winter, Danny, Holly."

"Me?" Holly asked, surprised. She was the Zord girl, not the action girl.

Phantom nodded. "Yes, you," he said.

Swallowing hard, Holly took the Yellow Key, Danny took the Blue Key and Taran took the Red Key. They

winked out.

Phantom moved on. "Lani, Fox, Sora, Zara."

Tai gave Lani's hand a squeeze before she went and grabbed the Red Key. Fox took the Blue Key. Sora took the Black Key and Zara took the Silver Key. They winked out as well.

Phantom set out the remaining three keys. They were familiar to all. "This is the most important piece. Know it or even believe it or not, the three of you are among the most special of an incredibly special group of Rangers," he said gravely.

Melody clenched the fist of her right hand. Tai raised a brow but Billie just looked grouchy. Tai shook his head and grabbed the Red Key. Mel took the Pink Key and Billie took the Yellow Key and they also winked out of existence.

"Okay, Beez. You can drop the hologram," Phantom stated when only they and Billy were left in the Command Center. The visage of the Phantom Ranger faded from around Jason. Still he wore a leather uniform reminiscent of his Phantom Power Suit.

"What now?" Billy asked.

"Now we wait and hope they make it back."

-xTo Be Continuedx-

## 24 - Wild Quest

### 2006, Angel Grove

The skies were dark over the city. Pinkish-purple lightning flashed around in the clouds. Occasionally one of the bolts would hit something below. On top of all this, three powerful monsters; the pile of melted vinyls Kordec, the craggy frog headed Zirynoc, and the horn faced Saksor; were wreaking havoc. They were presently being distracted by automobile sized spirit animals, ninja powers and the Senturion Squad.

A massive, blinding bolt of lightning as thick as a person hit the middle of Angel Grove Park. The simultaneous crack of thunder was loud enough to shatter every piece of glass for miles. After the flash, there stood a woman as tall as a building. Her eyes blazed with pink energy and the air around her crackled with power. "Citizens of Earth! Watch as I crush this world beneath my boot heel! I'll start with this pathetic little city!" Riti announced. "I will rule this galaxy and beyond," she said, clenching her fist. Bone Drones began appearing around the city.

"Don't you mean "we"?" Rio demanded of her mother from her feet. Riti ignored this question. "Not even you're Power Rangers can stop me. See how they hide?" she through back and laughed. Rio didn't find this very amusing.

No one else did either. It was true. Where were the Power Rangers? Were they afraid to face this giant woman and her minions? Did something happen to them?

### 2002, Turtle Cove

Had anyone seen them, it would, perhaps, have been quite jarring to see four people appear out of thin air clutching what looked like children's toys. Luckily, Lani, Fox, Sora and Zara ended up in the woods outside a bustling little city. "Where do you think we are?" Zara asked.

"Turtle Cove. It looks like springtime, so probably 2003," Fox answered. This little nugget of information caused the others to look at him. "I've taken a look at the archives, too," he said. He held up a small replica of Blue Ranger. Each of them had one in varying colors. They were called Morph Keys and they were what the Phantom Ranger had given them to bring them out of their time and into another. "I recognized them. They're the Wild Force Rangers and they operated out of Turtle Cove," he added.

The little figure began to glow and his wrists vibrated urgently. He twisted his wrists and his black cuffs appeared. Lani and Sora followed suit. Zara twisted her wrist to make her communicator appear but a second cuff appeared on her other arm. The Morph Keys bonded to the Morphers. Lani's Power Coin turned red and an embossed eagle in flight took the place of her usual gold T-Rex. Fox's Power Coin turned blue and his Mastodon was replaced with a Shark. Sora's Power Coin turned into a Black Bison. With Zara, the Key formed a silver Power Coin that had a wolf's head on it.

"Well, I suppose that's one way to go about it," Sora said. He twisted his wrists again and the cuffs

disappeared from view.

"I wonder how they're supposed to lead us to the Staff piece," Lani said.

"First thing's first, though," Zara said, eyeing Lani. In all the excitement of the day, though more than a little disheveled, she still wore her red and pink hanbok from her Heritage Day concert. "We should find you something to change into," she said.

Lani looked down at herself and groaned. "How am I still wearing this thing?" she complained.

Sora chuckled. "I think it looks charmin', but I agree, it's probably best to not draw so much attention to ourselves," he said.

"Well, let's go the city. I'm sure there's a thrift shop," Fox said.

Lani nodded. "I think we have to head that way anyway," she said. Something in her general wrist area was tugging her that way. She led the way out of the woods and into the city.

-x-

Divya Majumdar walk-jogged to keep up with her friend's long legged gait. "I thought Texans were supposed to saunter and swagger like they had all the time in the world," she commented. Her high, straight black ponytail swished in time with her steps. "Where are you in a hurry to get to?" she demanded. "We're just meeting RJ for pizza," she stated smartly.

"I ain't walkin' fast. You're legs are just short," Damien Henderson answered. He flashed her a smile to soften his jab, but he did slow down enough for her not to have to run to catch up. She rolled her dark eyes at him, but she was grateful he slowed his pace.

He suddenly stopped so abruptly she ran into his back. "Oof! What now?" she demanded and peered around him. Coming out of a thrift shop was a motley group of kids around their age. Though the Asian guy seemed a little older. Divya looked at them and looked at Damien. His pupils were dilated. That was often an indication that he was seeing what she couldn't.

"He's Spirit Seeing?"

Divya didn't even jump when the lanky, long haired RJ spoke from her other side. He often just kind of came out of nowhere like that. He skulked around the shadows and walked almost without making a sound, giving every appearance of just appearing out of thin air. She nodded. "What do you see?" she asked, and poked Damien in the side.

"That scrawny kid is almost as sharky as Master Finn," Damien answered. RJ made a face at the mention of his father.

Divya's eyes widened. "Wow. Another shark. What about the other two?" she asked. "You didn't stop and look all hocus-y because of a shark boy," she said.

Damien shook his head. "The two girls are really vibrant. The shorter one is a really powerful looking falcon and the edgy one is a wily looking coyote. But that guy, I can't get a handle on him. It's almost as bad as looking at Shayla when she's hosting," he explained. He blinked his eyes several times, feeling slightly queasy.

Sora, being not quite human, didn't quite have spidey-senses like Taran and Lammy, but he defiantly felt watched. He glanced over and saw the trio looking at them. "We've drawn attention," he said.

Lani rolled her eyes and scowled at the brown shopping bag that now housed her hanbok. "Maybe I should have kept that on," she said. "Smile politely and move on," she said.

Fox did a double take. "Hey, that's him. That's the guy who was shooting out a bloody huge lion," he said, pointing at Damien without thinking. "The one with Jason's br--" Sora clapped a hand over Fox's mouth.

"Just smile politely and move on," he repeated.

"Move on to where exactly?" Zara asked Lani. She seemed to be the one being led on.

Lani sighed and tried to point past the trio without appearing to do so. "That way," she said.

"Hang on, I'll scout alternate routes," Sora said and through he blurred slightly it was subtle enough not to be noticed overly much and a duplicate of him appeared across the street and went to scout around.

"Try not to be obvious about looking, but the rangy long-haired one just broke off from the other two," Zara said casually.

"D'you think he saw my duplicate?" Sora asked, paling slightly. Fox tried to say something but his mouth was still covered. "Ah, sorry, mate," he said and took his hand away.

Fox cleared his throat. "We should just go. There's no reason any of 'em should be especially interested in us unless we act strange, like duplicating in public," he said.

"I'll have you know, I'm very good at duplicating in public," Sora declared. "The only way he would've noticed is if he isn't exactly normal. Come on, this way," he said finally. They crossed the street, following Sora's directions until they finally ended up going the way they needed to go. They met up with the Sora duplicate and he merged into one again.

"The pull is definitely getting stronger," Lani said as they began to leave the main part of the city behind and pass through smaller but ritzier neighborhoods.

"We're being followed," Zara said. "Whoever it is, they're really good but, well, telekinetic space girl here."

"How exactly does that work?" Fox asked.

"I move things with my mind," Zara answered deadpan.

Sora snorted back a chuckle. "Aye, we know that part. Explain the rest," Sora said. Since he was trained on KO-35 he was familiar with the telekinetic .1% of the population. Since he was trained by her brother, he also understood Zara was snarky by default.

"I sense energy fields and manipulate them," Zara said. "Well, if you want to get technical, I see energy fields. When I'm actively using my abilities I can only see things in shades of purple. Energy fields glow brighter when I'm fiddling with them," she explained.

"That's flippin' amazin'," Fox declared, shaking his head in awe.

"Is it just the one?" Lani asked Zara. She was also rather impressed by the information, but she needed information about their tail.

"I can expand more if you want me to, but I have to stop and really concentrate," Zara answered.

Sora spotted a convenience store. "Let's stop a tick and get some water. I feel like we've been walking for bloody hours," he said.

"So that's why my feet feel like they're about the fall off," Fox complained. It was surprisingly the first time he'd complained, but he supposed months' worth of training has been paying off.

"Grandpa and Tai haven't whipped you into shape yet?" Lani asked and tsked him. She led her little foursome to the convenience store. Fox made a face but didn't answer. After they bought bottles of water and granola bars, Zara leaned against the building and let her vision become purple and her perceptions expand.

"Two. The lanky long-haired one and other one. They're the only ones following us. The girl got a head of us somehow and has joined with three others. They're all in a group," she said and blinked several times to clear her vision. Her head swam and she pitched forward.

Sora caught her and steadied her. "Easy. You did too much. Zhane warned you about that," he scolded.

Lani frowned at her. "There was no need to over extend yourself if it's dangerous," she added.

"Geeze, Mum and Dad, give it a rest," Fox said and handed Zara a water. She took it gratefully.

Lani snorted. "Please. Sora is so not my type," she said. "No offense," she added.

"None taken. I feel the same way," he assured her.

Zara and Fox stared at them.

"I thought tall Asian leprechauns were exactly your type," Fox told Lani.

"And slim Oriental spitfires yours," Zara told Sora.



Though that had them for a minute, Lani rallied gracefully. "Sora's not a samurai," she declared.

"And Lani's not a sorceress," Sora added.

Zara admitted defeat by taking a long a drink of her water and pretending she didn't lose. Fox just shook his head at the both of them.

"I can see the girl coming. She's with AJ and two other people," Sora said just as he was taking a sip of water. "No, they stopped far enough away to pretend they aren't keeping an eye on us," he added while taking a keen interest in his granola bar.

"The trackers are circling around to join them," Zara murmured.

"What's the next step, Mum?" Fox asked. He produced a cosmic sprinkled brownie and broke it in half and offered the other half to Zara in case she needed the sugar spike since she was doing so much.

Zara took the brownie with a smile. "I want to know what we did to garner so much attention anyway. They were eyeballing us before Sora duplicated," she said around a mouthful of brownie.

Lani wrinkled her nose. "Do they not have manners on KO-35?" she asked. Before she could decide the next course of action, something strange happened. Creatures began appearing around them. They were mostly humanoid and gray with fiery red stripes waving around them. They had nearly featureless faces but small single horns protruded from their heads. Some had strange bladed weapons. The foursome out of time weren't the targets, it seemed to just be a random incursion as the creatures began to harass and attack people going about their daily lives.

"Defend yourselves, but don't get carried away," Lani said as one of the creatures came at her. She ducked the blade and lashed out with her shopping bag, knocking it out of his hand and kicking him in the chest.

"I think she means no triplicating," Fox said. He picked up a lightweight table that was set up outside the store and smashed it against one of the creatures. The table shattered but the legs he'd had a hold of remained in his hands. He gave them an experimental twist-and-swish. He concluded they'd do and began using them against the creatures that came at him.

Sora thought that was a handy idea. "Let's me give it a try," he said. He grabbed the only remaining table and broke the legs off. "Lani!" he said and tossed her one and kept the other. He didn't really need to triplicate to handle a few grunts. He slashed and jabbed and kicked any that got in his way.

Though Zara was proficient at the Kovarian martial art, she didn't have much sword training, so she went to her old stand-by. She grabbed the lids of a couple of trash cans and clanged them against the head of a creature and tossed one after another, letting them zip around.

Lani tumbled between the legs of another one. She saw then, that their would-be trackers were also engaging the creatures. They worked as a team and were highly skilled. They used a style of Kung Fu she didn't recognize. There was one thing she was sure of. "They're the Wild Rangers. We need to get out of here, now," she said. "Zara, make us a path," she said, pointing with her table leg.

The trashcan lids spun in the direction Lani indicated. They began running through the opening the lids made until they were safely past the fight. Zara let the lids drop, but they kept running, following Lani's lead.

-x-

Evan Chamberlain barely managed to see that the four strangers that had Damien and RJ so perplexed had disappeared from the battle with the Putrids. They'd managed to pretty much clear out the creatures. It didn't bode well. Putrid attacks were a usual tactic to keep the Wild Rangers off balance. It meant the Orgs were up to something, but when that "what" would be revealed was an unknowable variable. It could be a few hours or a few days. Evan hated unknown variables. He ran a hand through his dark blonde hair and gave a ragged sigh.

"Did you see that skinny kid with those table legs? That was some grade-A training right there," AJ Scott commented appreciatively. "I feel like I've seen that technique before but I can't think where," he said.

"Was it my imagination, or were trash can lids flying around by themselves?" Zoe Myers asked, perplexed.

"No, I saw that, too," RJ assured her and cocked his head.

"They were all pretty well trained," Damien commented.

"Can either of you pick up their trail again?" Divya asked.

RJ nodded and loped off in the direction they were last seen and began to move back in forth in a jog.

"Angel Grove!" AJ said suddenly, brightening.

"Beg pardon?" Divya asked.

"Last time I visited my grandparents, I went to an exhibition with my brother and sister. There were these two kids with two wooden swords each demonstrating that technique. It was a technique developed by Akira Watanabe if I remember right. Neither kid was that kid though. One was the grandson, the other one had dark hair," he was saying thoughtfully.

RJ came back to them. "I have their trail. I think they're headed for Animaria," he said.

"We'd better get going then instead of obsessing over sword techniques," Divya said.

Zoe just shook her head at her friend. "You have no idea who Akira Watanabe is. And you're supposed to be smart," she teased. But she was all in favor of going. "Remind me and I'll ask my cousins if they know anything about it," she told AJ as they started out, following RJ and now Damien as they began tracking the strangers again.

-x-

Lani, Fox, Sora and Zara walked on and on and on. "You'd think the Keys could have plopped us a little closer to the Staff piece," Fox complained more than once. There was an obstacle when they came upon a large, elaborate electrified fence. "What the--is this Jurassic Park or something?" Fox asked. But they managed to get over the fence with the help of three Soras and Zara's telekinesis.

"Are you going to make it if you keep using it like that?" Fox asked her when he noticed how tired she was beginning to look.

She gave him a wan smile. "I'll be ok. I've done more than this for longer in training. You only thought Karone was tough in teaching Kung Fu. Try tk lessons from her," she said.

"I think I prefer her over Tai and Grandpa. If you've never been chewed out in Japanese by an old man who looks like Skittles puked on him, you don't know tough," Fox said.

Lani smothered a laugh but shot Fox a small glare. "Don't talk about Grandpa like that," she scolded.

Fox held up his hands. "No harm meant. Grandpa is a bamf. I 'bout fell out when I saw him taking on Rio single handed," he said with a grin.

Lani grinned. "Yeah."

"Wish I could have seen that," Zara complained.

Sora chuckled. "It was a sight to behold," he said. He began looking around with a frown.

"What's wrong?" Lani asked, instantly going on alert.

Sora, shook his head. "Something about this place...it reminds me of Mirinoi," he said.

Somewhere along the endless walk, they'd passed through the normal forests of California and ended up in a more lush jungle setting.

Zara glanced around. "I see what you mean. There's even something about the air that's similar," she agreed. They all jumped when they heard strange inhuman sounds in the distance.

"I don't think we're in Kansas anymore," Lani said quietly. "I think we're nearly wherever we're supposed to be," she said. From then on they moved silently. The sounds came more regularly, like large mechanical animals.

"They sound a bit like Galactabeasts," Sora noted, Zara nodded to agree.

They soon came upon a nearly perfect, hemispherical lake with water so clear they could see the bottom and everything else. They saw fish, seaweed and other lake creatures. In the center, at the bottom of the lake, they saw the staff piece. It was a little over a foot long. "Well, we made it to the end of the tunnel. Now we find out what's outside," Lani said. "Come on but be on guard. Phantom Ranger said that the staff pieces were guarded. I have to be ready for anything," she said. She looked around for a moment

and found a tree to hang her bag on. Afterwards she began to lead her team toward the lake.

They'd only gone a few feet when the ground began to shake. The lake began to bubble like something was surfacing from beneath the water. Something large. Though nothing was visible from beneath the water, once it hit the air, it began to appear. It wasn't as large as a Mega-sized monster, but it wasn't as small as a normal-sized monster. But it was a monster.

It was big and black and covered in pipes and steam funnels. In one hand he held a big black nozzle of some sort. Water vapor rose from his steam funnels. "You shall not pass!" he said and fired a blast of superheated steam directly at them.

-x-

The Wild Rangers continued following the trail left by the strangers. "How did they jump the fence?" AJ wondered, looking up at the black monstrosity. No one had a ready answer. They had to detour to their usual way over the fence near their school where Divya had diverted the flow of electricity to allow them a safe spot to climb over.

They were concerned when they confirmed the strangers had crossed into Animaria, but there was relief when it became obvious they weren't headed to the Animarium itself. They continued onward for miles. "I don't think I've been to this part of Animaria before. Where are they headed?" Evan said thoughtfully.

A figure stepped out of the shadows before them and held her staff out to bar their way. "If you go further you must not interfere," Dulcea told them.

"What's going on?" Evan demanded. He wasn't surprised to see Dulcea there. She knew Animaria better than anyone. But for her to tell them to stay out of things was strange.

Dulcea shook her head and took the lead. "I'm not sure of all the details myself. They're after something that was put in this time and place long ago. That's all Shayla and I know about the whole thing. We knew that one day someone would come for it and if they were worthy, would be allowed to leave with it. What it is, we have no idea," she explained. "No matter what you see, you must not interfere," she reiterated.

"We got it. No interference," Evan assured her on behalf of everyone who may not exactly have felt the same way.

-x-

Lani, Sora, Fox and Zara scattered from the plume of steam. "Do you think it's safe to Morph?" Fox called to Lani as he dodged a jet of steam directed at him. He yelped when his leg was nearly scalded.

"What if the other Rangers are using their Morphs?" Zara asked and used her power to levitate herself into a high jump that had her practically landing in a tree.

"It's been hours. It may be a risk we have to take," Sora said, wishing he had his CeratoSword, but it didn't exist on Earth in this time period.

Lani bent over backward and felt the heat of the steam that barely missed her. If she hadn't been so flexible she'd have been in trouble.

Fox took cover behind the boulder. "In case everyone's forgotten, I'm not an alien and my defective Coin didn't give me super powers so a decision would be good," he said. Sweat and humidity from the steam had his whole body drenched.

"We don't have a choice," Lani agreed finally and twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Wild Access!" She brought her two cuffs together as normal. A bright orb of red light formed around her. Gold topped red boots, gold topped white gloves, and a gold striped red suit with a crest over her heart formed from the light. A ghost image of a majestic eagle formed her helmet.

"Wild Access!" The others repeated and joined their cuffs. Orbs of light appeared around them forming gold topped colored boots, gold topped white gloves and colored suits with gold stripes across their chests and crests over their hearts.

The ghost image of a charging bison formed the Black Ranger's helmet. The ghost image of a razor-toothed shark formed the Blue Ranger's helmet. The ghost image of a howling wolf formed Lunar Wolf's helmet and navy-ish diamonds along the sides of her Power Suit and one arm to the same color.

-x-

That was almost the same moment as the true Wild Rangers appeared on the scene. Evan, Divya, Zoe, and RJ felt the moment their powers were borrowed. It didn't hurt, they just felt the absence of the power of their Wild Zords.

AJ smacked his own forehead. "Of course they're Power Rangers. We should have guessed that. But how did they do that? I thought the Wild Zord orbs bonded with our animal spirits," he said musingly.

Dulcea shook her head. "I don't know how that could be," she said.

"They used the closest match to their own animal spirits. The Falcon, the Shark, the Coyote and I think one of the fragments I could see in that other guy was a great stag," Damien said quietly.

"Are you sure we shouldn't help?" Divya asked Dulcea.

"I'm sure," Dulcea said, though it was a tough thing to just sit and watch.

-x-

Red flexed her fingers. She definitely felt like she was borrowing someone's clothes who was a slightly different size than she was.

"Well, this is different," Black mused as he looked himself.

"But not skeletal so that has to be a plus," Blue commented. Unlike Red, his suit felt almost as if were

made for him. It felt more natural than his Black one.

"So amaze," Lunar declared.

The guardian of the staff was less than impressed with their change. He changed tactics and let out a high powered spray of boiling water. The Rangers scrambled to take cover again.

"This guy means business, doesn't he?"

"Well, it's time to strike back," Red said. "Red Eagle Sword!" she summoned. A long regal looking sword appeared in her hands. She ran forward, ducking and dodging attacks. She got in close to the body of the oversized monster and slashed it several time, leaving red flashes and the monster sparked and steamed.

"Blue Shark Fighting Fins!" Blue summoned. "Seriously?" he added and shook his head but when the dual weapons appeared he joined with Red in attacking the monster bodily.

"Black Bison Axe!" Black summoned an axe reminiscent of a pair of horns. Instead of going in close, he chose instead to put all his strength into flinging the Axe at the Guardian.

"Lunar Cue! Saber Mode!" Lunar summoned something that was part fencing foil and part pool cue. "What's with these weapons?" she wondered. She rushed forward and jumped. "Full Moon Slash!" She slashed a glowing silvery crescent in the air. A sound like the wind howling mixed with a wolf howling. The energy crashed into the monster.

The monster roared in pain and steam blew out of his funnels. He swept his arm wilding and knocked into the Rangers, sending them flying through the air and landing in a heap. He let out another barrage of boiling water at them.

Lunar managed to divert the stream. "What now?" she asked Red.

Red took a deep a deep breath and dropped the Eagle Sword. "We keep trying until we get it," she said. "Falconator!" she summoned. A cross-bow like falcon-themed weapon appeared on her arm.

"Right," the other three agreed.

Blue dropped his fins. "Sword of Pardolis!" a short, squat giraffe-themed sword appeared in his hand.

Black triplicated. The one of him that held the Bison Axe dropped it. "Rhino Shooter!" A rather large rhinoceros themed blaster appeared in his hands.

"Deer Clutch!" one of the triplicates summoned. A gripper shaped like the horns of buck appeared in his hands.

"Armadillo Puck!" the other triplicate summoned a purple-ish weapons that was shaped like an oversized hockey puck. "Trade!" he called to Lunar and tossed the puck in her direction.

She caught it with her mind and sent the Lunar Cue to him. She tossed the Puck at the monster. It spun and hit him wherever she needed it to. Whenever he would try to aim his nozzle, the Puck would hit and knock his aim askew.

This allowed the other Rangers opportunities. Two of the Black Ranger went in close and the other began firing and taking out steam funnels. Blue, though excelled at the Dual Sword Technique, was in fact trained by two samurai and could handle a single blade well enough, went in close and slashed at one of the monster's knees. Red ran forward, and bent backwards, sliding on her knees beneath him. She twisted around in a position that would have been impossible for most people and fired a red energy bolt into his back.

The Guardian began to make a noise that sounded like a boiler about to explode. Within moments, steam exploded outward, sending the Rangers flying again. But they landed and rallied well. "Trade back!" one of the Blacks said to Lunar. Once again weapons were exchanged.

"Lunar Cue Sniper Mode!" the Cue changed shaped and shorted. Its core began to glow and she aimed it. She pulled a nearly formed trigger and several balls of massive energy were fired at the monster. They exploded against him.

"Jungle Blaster!" Red called. Blue and the three Black Rangers brought in their weapons to combine them into a cannon. It was huge and she had trouble holding it but two of the Black Rangers knelt to provide support for her. She fired at the guardian. Reeling from the blasts from the Lunar Cue, it was in no condition to survive the blow from the blaster. It exploded.

Then it vanished as if it had never existed. The weapons disappeared and their Morphs dropped. The staff piece flew out of the water and hovered before them. Sora merged into one being. "Guess this means we can go home now," he said.

"What a ride," Fox said with a whistle.

"Almost sad it's over," Zara said, not all eager to return to not being a Power Ranger.

"Remember, the fate of the world depends on this," Lani said quietly and reached out and grabbed the Staff piece. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. "Everyone, grab on," she said. Sora, Fox and Zara all reached out and grabbed hold of the Staff piece. They winked out of existence.

-X-

Evan rubbed his chest. His Zord was back where it belonged. Zoe, RJ and Divya seemed more at ease as well. Almost with one mind, the group moved down into the area and looked around. Though the clear lake remained, there was no evidence of the monster or the fight that had just taken place.

"What did we just witness?" Zoe asked.

"Fate of the world stuff, I reckon," Damien said off-handedly, still searching for a sign that they weren't all hallucinating.

It was Divya who found the proof. It was the brown shopping bag the Asian girl had hung on a tree. She was reading a card that was tucked inside with a profusion of silk and satin. "If found please return to Lokelani Lyong, 345 Deerborne Terrace, Angel Grove, California after May 9, 2006. If the world didn't end," she read.

Lani had left her hanbok four years in the past.

-xTo Be Continuedx-



## 25 - Ninja Quest

### Angel Grove, 2006

Kordec was a monster that seemed to be made of melted vinyl records was terrorizing the city. When his body vibrated he could create sound bombs that were devastating when launched. He'd been cocky when the Power Rangers had lost their Morphs. He just knew he would get them, but the lion and tiger the size of minivans had other ideas. They'd come out of nowhere and allowed the Rangers to escape.

Finally, blasting the creatures with sonic blasts, he scrambled to his feet. "What? What! Who did that?" he demanded, looking around.

Austin John Scott and his friend Damien Henderson both waved at him. They stood back to back. They wore traditional garb of the masters of a rare Kung Fu discipline known as Pai Zhua. "That would be us," AJ said.

"I came all this way for the shark kid and his friends, but what have you landed me in now?" Damien asked with a growl.

"Oh, you know," AJ shrugged "evil villains bent on world domination. Monsters. Grunts," he added as Kordec threw out several turtle-eggs that broke and formed a contingent of Bone Drones. "The usual."

"Yeah. The usual," Damien agreed drily. "Let's get it done," he said. AJ nodded. They separated and began to take on the Bone Drones.

"Hey, the ugly one is gettin' away," AJ said when he realized that Kordec was trying to slip away from the fight.

Two armored peopled in motifs reminiscent of police cruisers, one black and white, the other pink and white, appeared in front of Kordec. "You aren't going anywhere!" Black Senturion said, crossing his arms over his chest.

"This is your one warning, leave peacefully or you know, the other thing," Pink Senturion warned him.

AJ whistled under his breath. "We're going old school," he commented.

Damien snorted. "You have strange interests," he declared.

Before anymore could be said, giant Riti appeared in the middle of Angel Park and declared for the whole city to hear that she would crush their city, then the world.

"That's what she thinks," Pink said. "Senturion Synergizer!" A plate in her leg armor opened up and a large pistol shaped energy gun popped out. She drew it and began firing on Kordec between his sound bombs.

Black Senturion summoned his weapon as well. Eventually the foursome met up. "Thanks for the assist," AJ said.

"Thought you could use some help," Black said.

"Besides, your brother would kill us if something happened to you," Pink said.

Before AJ could process that, Kordec sent a massive sound bomb at them. They scrambled for cover. "Unleash the Tiger!"

"Unleash the Lion!"

Spirit cats and Synergy fire joined forces on Kordec. They only had to last until the Power Rangers made it back from wherever they went.

-X-

### **2003 Ocean Bluff**

In a blink Win, Danny and Holly were in a different time and place. No muss no fuss. Though where exactly they were they weren't sure about. They appeared in a grassy field. In the distance Win could hear the engines of what he figured were ATVs or maybe dirt bikes. Further on he could hear the ocean. The scent was in air enough for even Holly and Danny to detect.

Win rubbed the back of his neck. "Where do you guys think we are?" he asked.

Danny pulled his PDA from his pocket with the hand that wasn't clutching the blue Morph Key. "I should be able to access local networks and assess that very thing," he said and began tapping buttons with his thumb. "There we go. GPS has us in Ocean Bluff. It's 2003. According to the data I downloaded while Phantom was speechifyin', there are six Rangers operating locally. "Wind Rangers, Thunder Rangers, and a Samurai Ranger," he explained.

Win nodded.

Holly was griping her little Yellow Key and staring at it. "What's up, babe?" Danny asked.

"Just trying to figure out why I'm here. I'm not a Ranger nor have I ever thought to be one. I'm not even trained," she said.

"Things like this usually happen for a reason," Win assured her.

"And I wouldn't worry about the training. You're strong and agile. You do yoga with Lani, I've seen you scale a Zord in less than a minute, tote around wrenches that weigh as much as my sister and heft air guns that weigh as much as Jason," Danny assured her. She gave him a smile even though he was exaggerating.

Win looked at his red Morph Key. His wrists began to vibrate urgently. He twisted his wrists and his green cuffs appeared. The Morph Key glowed. The other Keys began glowing as well. Danny twisted his wrists and his blue cuffs appeared. Holly made her communicator appear but a second cuff appeared around her other wrist. The Morph Keys bonded with their Morphers. Win's cuffs and Power Coin turned red. The image of the Stygimoloch on the Coin was replaced with an embossed white emblem that looked like a pair of wings. Danny's Coin stayed blue but his triceratops was replaced with an embossed white emblem like a dolphin tail. Holly's newly formed cuffs turned yellow and a Coin appeared with a white embossed emblem like a lion's roaring mouth with a mane around it. They twisted their wrists again and the cuffs disappeared.

Holly rubbed her wrists, a surprised look on her face. "Wow," she murmured.

"Yeah, it's like that," Danny said with a grin. "So what now?" he asked, looking at Win.

Win was also rubbing his wrist but for a different reason. "Now, we get going and try not to get into any trouble," he said.

"Us? Trouble?" Danny scoffed. "Never," he added dryly.

Holly shook her head. "He jinxed us," she declared.

"Big time," Danny agreed.

Win grimaced but began walking to where he was being led by a subtle but insistent tugging in his wrists. He had a feeling they were right. He'd jinxed them. Danny and Holly took up a pace behind him, Danny showing Holly a few basic moves that could help if she needed them.

-x-

The field had seemed to last forever. They walked and walked and walked. "Jeeze Louise, ain't there supposed to be a city around here somewhere?" Danny remarked. They'd finally crossed out of the field and had tromped through a bit of a wooded area. "What I wouldn't give for a Cycle 'bout now," he said, especially now that he was able to hear the motors in not far away. "Maybe we could borrow or rent some wheels or something," he said.

"Or considering who I'm traveling with, finding some spare parts and building some," Win commented.

"Oh, you crack jokes, but it's true," Danny declared with a grin.

"My aunt's boyfriend gave me a Cinderella-style pumpkin carriage for Barbie when I was little. I turned it into a Zord. Cinderella was much happier with it than a carriage," Holly stated. She patted her tool belt. It probably weighed more than she did. She'd been wearing it and her coveralls at the time she was summoned to the Power Chamber. "Uh-oh," she said.

"What is it?" Win asked.

"Just the logo on my coveralls is for Nodroz Corp.," she said with a grimace. She unzipped it and pulled

it down to her waist and tied the sleeves in front of her. "No need for people to make connections they shouldn't," she declared. Though she had to admit that in just her gray tank, she was a bit chilled.

Danny smiled slightly. "Ah, daylight," he declared when they popped out of the tree line. "You want me to carry your belt for a while?" he asked Holly.

"Force-field!" Win shouted just as he went intangible. A dirt bike spun through the air. It passed through Winter and crashed into Danny's force-field and smashed into pieces. Holly was scrunched against him, preparing for the worst, but Win's warning had been in time.

Three boys ran up to them. They all wore helmets, protective gear and jumpsuits of moto-cross riders. "My bike!" one of them gasped, looking at the ruin that was scattered in a semi-circle around Danny and Holly with Winter in the midst of the debris itself.

"I'm sure the people you... (almost?) hit are fine, too, Dustin," said another boy as he removed his helmet and revealed shaggy hair the color of wet sand.

The third guy removed his helmet to reveal a warm skinned face, dark eyes and short dark hair. He surveyed the wreckage with bemusement.

Dustin Brooks took off his helmet. He was tanned and dark haired and had an affable face. "Oh, man. I'm so sorry. I was trying to do a trick going up the hill, I hit a rock, I went flying one way and the bike went flying the other. Wow, how come you guys aren't like...my bike?" he asked, gesturing to the wreck helplessly.

Hunter Bradley cocked his head slightly. "That is a very good question," he agreed slowly.

Danny eased Holly behind him. She didn't argue with the move. "Just lucky, I guess. Bike must have hit something before it got here," he said, and strangely enough he dropped his usual New Yorker accent and spoke more like a native Californian.

"Yeah, that bike came out of nowhere and almost crushed my little brother and his girlfriend," Winter said with a frown. He hated doing that but there was no way to explain that he was able to become a ghost and Danny could generate force-fields with his hands.

Blake Bradley looked at the wreckage again. Then he surveyed the area. The trees were beyond the semi-circle of wreckage and the strange trio. "Yeah," he said slowly.

"Huh, you guys don't look like brothers," Dustin said. At that point the two Bradley's gave Dustin an exasperated look. "Ah, yeah that was a stupid observation, huh?" he said. Blake and Hunter Bradley were adopted brothers.

Danny nodded. "We get that a lot," he said with a shrug. "Actually we're a bit lost. We're new to the area. I ain't into it personally, but Brayden Myers is my girlfriend's cousin and he asked her to come work on his something with his bike--"

"I have to replace the piston in his clutch master cylinder and the O-ring on the piston in his slave

cylinder," Holly said with a guileless expression and shook her head.

"He wasn't at the track when we got there so we decided to take a walk and got turned around," Winter finished up. At least Danny and Holly seemed to know what they were talking about.

"Brayden isn't riding here today," Hunter said, shooting them a suspicious look.

Holly sighed. "That's just great," she complained. "I come all this way to do him a favor. Do I charge for my mechanical expertise? No I don't. If he's not going to be here, he should tell someone," Holly began complaining and stomping away from the guys, keeping up a steady stream of complaints on Brayden Myers.

"Oh, now there's going to be trouble. Excuse us," Danny said and jogged off to catch up with Holly. Win shot the other guys an apologetic look and caught up with Danny, who trailed off behind Holly who still seemed to be in high dudgeon.

"So who's Brayden Myers," Winter asked quietly.

"He's my cousin. He's actually a factory rider but he'd pass through Ocean Bluff a few times a year," Danny answered.

"How many cousins do you have?" Win asked, remembering that not long ago they met Simon Creed, the Blue Guardian Ranger and a cousin of the Kennedy's.

Danny shrugged. "A few. Ma's one of seven sisters," he explained. "Is Holly throwing her fit the right way?" he asked.

Winter nodded. "Yeah, but once we go a few more yards, I think we make a run for it. Holly, I'll take your belt. We need to be quick and make for those trees at the foot of the mountains," he said.

Holly didn't stop her rampage. As if in a pique she took off her tool belt and threw it at Win's feet. "You carry this! I don't even want to look at it right now! I may have had other plans for today. I certainly didn't want to almost get killed because of some freestyler who can't even handle his bike!" she shouted back toward the direction they just came from.

Win kept a straight face and picked up the belt and drape it over his shoulder. Being part of whatever aliens made up Taran and Lammy, he had enhanced strength and it wouldn't weigh him down as much as it would her.

"Just a little more," Danny murmured. He gave a look over his shoulder. The riders were out of sight. "Go!" he said and they made a break for it.

-x-

"I can control my bike...usually," Dustin said with a frown.

Blake clapped him on the shoulder. "We know you can," he said with a slight smile.

"This is weird, right?" Hunter asked, gesturing to the wreckage.

"It's very weird. And Brayden Myers hasn't ridden here for ages. And we would know if there was a pretty redheaded mechanic around town, right?" Blake asked.

Hunter nodded. "We'd definitely know. Well, *I'd* know. Don't know if you'd see past Tori long enough," he added with a crooked grin.

"Don't know what you're talking about," Blake said.

"Maybe we should go after them and find out what they did to my bike," Dustin said.

"Blake and I will go. You get Shane, Tori and Cam. There may end up being some trouble," Hunter said.

Dustin nodded. He ran off, eventually leaving nothing behind but a streak of yellow.

Blake and Hunter pulled on their jumped suits and revealed black leather ninja uniforms. Blake's was shot through with navy blue and Hunter's with crimson. They ran toward where the trio had gone, but saw no sign of them. "They must have run for the trees! We never should have let them go," Hunter said, clenching his fist.

"What would we have detained them for? Not getting killed by Dustin's bike?" Blake asked. Hunter shook his head.

"Come on, let's see if we can find their trail. They were just here. Unless they can ninja streak, too, they shouldn't be too far ahead of us," he said. Blake nodded and they looked around for signs of their passing. The two guys didn't really leave much of one, but the girl was a different story and they picked up on her easily and began following along.

-X-

Eventually, Winter, Danny and Holly came to the outskirts of the city. They could see the buildings in the distance. The area they popped into was a small, neat little neighborhood away from the main hustle and bustle. "We should get some water or something for the rest of the trip. I'm assumin' we ain't nowhere near where we're goin'," Danny declared.

Winter shook his head. "I don't think so. Seems like we still have a way to go," he said. "We'll grab some water and some snacks," he agreed. He actually hadn't had much to eat since that morning and he was starving, craving a much calorie intake these days than he had before Widow experimented on him.

"Great. We can stop and rest a minute. My feet are dying," Holly said. Sure, she was probably in better shape than the usual geek, but she still hadn't had the kind of training Danny put himself through on a daily basis and wasn't genetically altered like Winter.

"There's a coffee shop with a patio. We can get some muffins," Danny glanced at Win, "and whatever else you'll need. We'll get some tea and grab some water for the road," he said.

"I thought I was supposed to be the one in charge," Win declared with a slight smile.

"Who said you ain't?" Danny asked. "I'm strictly tech support," he said, holding up his hands. "Don't try to make me responsible for anything else," he said firmly.

Win snickered and headed toward the coffee shop.

"What's he laughing at?" Danny asked Holly.

She slipped one of her arms around his. "Well, it's probably just that he's noticed, that in the absence of Tai or Rex or Taran, you've occasionally stepped up and made sure things got done," she said.

"That's not leaderin'. That's just doin' what somebody had to do," Danny said. "'Sides, I like being tech support," he declared as they followed Win to the coffee shop.

Holly smiled. "Me, too," she agreed.

A few minutes later they sat around a little table. Danny and Holly each had some tea and a bran muffin, while Winter demolished about a dozen different types of coffee shop pastries in probably the same amount of time. "Yeah, maybe I'll see what me and Billie can do about makin' you, Taran and Lammy somethin' small but calorie loaded. Watchin' you eat is a bit disturbing," Danny said finally.

"Danny," Holly admonished, jostling his arm.

Win smiled sheepishly. "It's okay. I know it's not pretty. I'd really appreciate something like that. I feel like I'm literally eating the profits sometimes when I do the books," he admitted.

Danny nodded. He pulled out his PDA and jotted something down. He was mostly mechanical and Billie mostly computers, but maybe Dr. Bill could help them out.

Winter suddenly cocked his head, listening. "Those guys from earlier are nearby," he said.

Danny raised a brow. "That a bad thing?" he asked.

Winter held up a finger as he continued to listen.

Hunter and Blake had finally caught up to the visitors awhile back. The only reason that they weren't heard by Win's enhanced hearing was due to their Ninja training. They stayed a good distance behind, not close enough to get any significant information, but they could tell they were headed somewhere in particular.

They met up with Dustin and three others not far away from the coffee shop; a well-built Polynesian boy by the name of Shane Clarke, a pretty blond girl named Tori Hanson, and a tall thin Asian guy in glasses named Cam Watanabe. They were now all dressed casually. Cam crossed his arm over his chest and eyed the trio. "What exactly is suspicious here?" he asked.

"You mean besides the amount of food that one guy just put away?" Blake asked.

"Dustin eats more than on a regular basis," Tori declared. "Seriously, what's the big emergency?"

"You should have seen what they did to my bike," Dustin said.

Hunter shook his head. "You're the one at fault for that. There's just *something*. They're headed somewhere. They were in a strange place for no real reason. My instincts say something is happening," he said.

"Something like Kelzaks?" Shane asked as these grunts appeared in the area. Stitched together and given red blades on their arms, red centipedes were painted on the dark faceless creatures.

While other patrons of the coffee shop panicked, Winter, Danny and Holly jumped to their feet. "What do we do?" Danny asked Winter.

"We'll make a break for it," Winter said. "We shouldn't get invo--" he didn't even finish his sentence before the Kelzaks decided that the trio standing around might be easy pickings. Little did they know. Win went intangible just as a Kelzak grabbed for him. It went right through him and stumbled over the table.

Holly grabbed her wrench from her tool belt and cracked it over the top of its tufted head. It didn't get back up.

Danny jumped kicked another in the chest and sent him sprawling. "Nice goin', babe," he said to Holly appreciatively.

"Guess you were right about my wrench," she said. She hit another one in the middle with her improvised weapon.

Danny didn't have a weapon, but he'd been working on more precise control over his force-field generating. Whenever he threw a punch, he projected a field a couple of millimeters in front of it so that there was a little more force in it. The only drawback was that it was tiring after a while.

Winter didn't rely too much on intangibility. Another so-called perk of Widow's experiments was his ability to form a tough exoskeleton on his skin. His hands now coated in goldish-brown protection, and his enhanced strength behind it, he was making a mess of the Kelzaks who were foolish enough to attack him.

Holly was getting separated from the boys. There must have been some sort of predatory instinct that told them she was the weak link. "Danny!" she shouted when she realized what had happened. Danny was too far away to help, but a girl in black garb saved her with a swing of a sword. "Oh, thanks," she said with a surprised smile.

Danny cursed to himself when he realized how far away Holly was. Realizing he couldn't keep using his force-fields without totally wiping out, he grabbed the umbrella from his table and broke it over his knee until he just held the shaft. He tried to beat a path to Holly but kept getting jammed up. A tall-ish black



clad figure appeared and helped him out. "Thanks, guy," he said and ran over to Holly to check on her.

Winter met up with them as well, only to see that the Kelzaks were gone and they were surrounded by the black clad figures. "Uh-oh. So much non-involvement," he said.

"That ship has sailed," Danny agreed.

"And was sank by the Kraken," Holly added.

A thick figure with dark red streaked throughout his black ninja uniform stepped forward. "Who are you? You're well trained. Well, mostly," Shane added with a quick glance at Holly.

"Yeah, but she throws a mean wrench in the works," Dustin in his yellow streaked suit said admiringly.

Danny scratched the back of his head, frowning. "So I wasn't just imaginin' they were after *us*, was I?" he asked.

Cam, in the green streaked suit, shook his head. "No, I don't believe that was the case," he stated, eying the trio, perplexed.

"Uh, what happened with your accent?" Blake asked.

Danny shrugged. "I was raised on Staten Island. How youse expect me to talk?" he asked. "Yeah, we ain't brothers. But, this is my girlfriend, quit lookin' at her," he added, cutting a glance at Dustin, who was still enamored with Holly's wrench wielding capabilities and perhaps her looks as well.

"I know you want answers, but we swear, we're not up to no good. We're on a mission," Winter said.

"We're gettin' the band back together," Danny quipped. So he couldn't resist the impulse.

"Wow, Cam, he's almost as sarcastic as you are," Hunter remarked quietly.

"Didn't think *that* was possible," Tori commented.

Holly cleared her throat. "Not that I'm an expert," she paused, "okay, I'm near enough, you guys probably don't have time to interrogate us because attacks by foot soldiers are usually soon thereafter followed by attacks from monsters," she pointed out.

Winter nodded. "That's true," he said and pointed. Though the others couldn't yet, he could hear the presence of a monster indeed.

Shane grimaced. "Come one. We'll deal with this later," he said. Though something told him the trio wasn't a threat to them. The six figures streaked off to face the newest threat from Lothor.

"Never so grateful for a monster attack," Winter said. He glanced at Danny. "You get kind of nasty when you're cornered," he remarked.

Danny nodded, not even considering denying that. "Don't like bein' cornered," he stated. "Chloe's worse," he said almost proudly.

Holly smiled and gathered her tool belt. "It's one of the things I like about him. We ready to finish this quest and get home?" she asked.

Winter nodded. "Yeah. Let's grab some bottles of water and get going. The sooner we get out of here the better," he agreed. The trio set off again, the quest for the staff piece still to be completed.

-x-

"So, is the point of this to exhaust us before we even find the staff piece?" Holly asked awhile later. They'd been heading steadily deeper into the mountains.

"If it were easy, then it'd just be too easy," Winter said sagely.

Danny raised a brow at him. "Yeah," he agreed. "Sides we're on a quest for a mystical artifact guarded by something only Power Rangers could get past. There's gotta be some forced tension," he declared.

"Still don't see why we couldn't have appeared nearer," Holly grumbled. She paused and looked around. They were standing near a mountain waterfall. "Do you hear something odd, Winter?" she asked.

"You can hear that, too?" Winter asked, surprised. He was used to hearing things normal humans couldn't and filtering them to the back of his mind.

"Hear what?" Danny asked, looking around.

"A kind of pulsing hum. It sounds kind of like you're force-fields, or Beez's holographic form," Holly answered.

Winter nodded. "It's coming from the waterfall," he said.

Danny looked at the waterfall and cocked his head. "Huh. Must be a hologram then. Clever cover for a base of operations. Smarter than stickin' it out in the middle of the desert," he added. "But, Hols, how did youse hear it?" he asked.

"Trained myself to listen for similar sounds. Sometimes the only way you can tell there's a problem with a Zord is by an out of place sound," she answered.

Danny nodded. "That ain't the way we gotta go though, is it?" he asked Winter.

Winter shook his head. "Nope. We have to keep going, but I think we're finally getting close. Further up and further in," he declared. With a bracing sigh, he began the trek anew.

"Did Win just make a Narnia reference?" Holly asked quietly.

Danny nodded. "I think he did," he answered. "It's oddly motivating. Further up and further in it is," he

declared and joined the trek with renewed vigor. Holly didn't quite agree but didn't lag behind. They were finally getting close and she couldn't wait for this to be over one way or another.

-X-

Ninja Rangers were returning to The Wind Academy when Dustin paused them. They'd just fought and barely won a battle against one of Lothor's space monsters. They had to report in with Sensei. Being an Earth Ninja, Dustin knew immediately something was different in front of the holographic waterfall that hid the entrance to the Wind Ninja Academy. "Someone's been here," he said.

Blake and Hunter immediately fanned out to look around.

"Did they head toward the Academy?" Tori asked.

Dustin shook his head. "Looks like they headed further into the mountains," he answered.

"Was it the same people from earlier?" Shane asked.

Hunter returned to them. "I got their trail. It's the same three. The guys barely leave a trace of their passing, but the girl just blunders on," he said.

"Should we follow them?" Blake asked.

"I don't think they're a threat," Tori said.

"Neither do I, but it would be a shame not to find out what they're up to," he stated.

Shane glanced around thoughtfully. "Let's go then. Lead the way," he said, to Hunter. The crimson ninja nodded and lead them off.

-X-

The trek ended abruptly for Winter when the insistent tugging in his wrist stopped completely. He rubbed it and looked around. "Well, we're here," he stated and gestured grandly to the abandoned mining operation that looked like it'd been kaput since the turn of the century except for the rusty, broken down excavator near some other old equipment.

"So there wasn't gold in them thar hills," Danny commented also surveying the mine site. There was a decrepit looking mine entrance carved into the side of the mountain.

"If there's a Balrog in there, I am so out," Holly stated. She pulled her wrench from her tool belt and clenched it tightly.

"Knowin' our luck, that's exactly what's in there," Danny declared. He took his glasses off and gave them a quick rub with the tail of his shirt.

Win cracked his fingers. "Well, there's only one way to find out for sure," he said and strode toward the

mine entrance. Danny and Holly fell into step behind him.

There came a rumbling, clanking sound as the old excavator came to life, its broken pieces becoming new and configuring itself in a large mechanical monster, gleaming yellow and silver, with shovel for one arm, scoops for feet and a red-eyed grill for a face. It hovered somewhere between the height of a one and two story house. Its four red eyes glowed fiercely, and a pipe from its chest rumbled menacingly.

"So, the staff piece is in the mine. We just have to get there," Holly surmised.

"Watch out!"

The Guardian held out a humanoid hand toward them. A barrel appeared out of his palm. The mine site erupted under a hail of bullets aimed at the questing trio.

-X-

The area was unfamiliar to the Ninja Rangers. Cam wasn't even as familiar with it as he should have been considering he grew up on this mountain. "Where are we?" Dustin asked.

Cam shook his head. "I don't know. I was never allowed to go so far into the mountain. I think there's some old abandoned mines or something," he said with a slight frown. Now that he thought about it, it seemed odd that he didn't know this area very well.

They heard the echo of automatic gunfire rip through the air. "What on Earth?" Tori gasped.

"Come on. We'd better hurry," Hunter said and began running. The other's followed. They skid to a stop just at the edge of the trees surrounding the old mine site. They couldn't really believe what they were seeing.

Danny stood in front of Holly with his force-field, the initial hail of bullets bouncing off. Win was intangible, but the bullets were ripping through the ground, kicking up debris and dust.

The behemoth stopped firing and swept forward with astonishing speed to swig his scoop arm at them. They scrambled and dove out of the way, but there wasn't much in the way of cover. "I don't think my wrench will be much help," she said to Danny when he pulled her behind a pile of pitted rocks.

Danny shook his head. "I don't guess, babe. Unless you think you can dismantle him," he added with a grim smile.

"He needs to stop shooting first," she muttered.

Winter rolled out of the way of the scoop. He barely managed another spring away as the Guardian also shot another round of bullets in the direction that Danny and Holly hid.

Dustin and Tori started to step out to help, but Shane and Cam reached for them. "Don't. I don't think we should interfere," Shane said warily.

"But they need our help," Tori protested.

"Do they?" Hunter asked, cocking his head at the scene.

"Yo, Win! You still alive?" Danny called out.

"Barely! I think it's time," Win shouted back.

"Time?" Holly asked.

Winter twisted his wrists and made his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time! Ninja Storm! Ranger Form! Ha!" He brought his two cuffs together as usual.

Danny and Holly made their cuffs appear. "Ninja Storm! Ranger Form! Ha!" they repeated and brought their cuffs together as well.

Bright swirls of wind energy emanated from their Morphers rotated around them and formed their power suits, helmets and swords strapped to their backs.

Red energy swirled around Win forming a mostly red suit with the white wings on his chest and a gold trimmed helmet with a visor that popped open and closed rather like his own. Yellow energy swirled around Holly forming a mostly yellow, skirted power suit with the white leonine emblem on her chest and a gold trimmed helmet. Blue energy swirled around Danny creating a mostly light blue power suit with the delphine tail symbol on his chest and a gold trimmed helmet.

Shane, Tori and Dustin were startled to say the last. "Hey! That's so not right!" Dustin said and once again started forward.

Cam redoubled his efforts to hold everyone back. "Stop. All of you. I think I know what this is. Sort of," he said and pursed his lips behind his mask.

"Mind sharing?" Blake asked.

Cam shook his head. "Just something from old scrolls barely remembered. You're not the only trio written about," he said. "I should digitize those things one day," he added to himself thoughtfully.

"So we're just supposed to watch this play out?" Shane demanded.

Cam nodded. The others didn't like it but they relented.

Meanwhile, the Red Ranger was taking stock of himself momentarily. It felt really strange to be borrowing someone else's power, but if he didn't then there would be no more Power Rangers in the future. He ran forward, drawing the sword from his back and slashed at the Guardian.

Blue Ranger bounced on the balls of his feet and shook himself out. "Dang, this feels weird," he grumbled. When Red drew his sword and ran forward, he did the same. The two of them slashed several times at the monster, but the Guardian swept them aside with his scoop and shot at them with

his other hand.

Yellow Ranger, for her part, was assimilating the fact of her new existence. She didn't attempt to help the boys slash the monster with swords. She was well aware of her own strengths and weaknesses and sword-fighting was not a strength. "Sorry about using you guys as a distraction," she said apologetically. "Lion Hammer!" She summoned. A long handled, yellow and silver hammer appeared in her hands. Hammers she knew. Hammers she could deal with. Sometimes taking a sledgehammer to a particularly stubborn set of a parts was the only way to deal with them.

She began running forward. She coiled all the strength in her legs and sprang upward, hefting the Hammer above her head. She crashed it into the ground near the feet of the Guardian. Yellow energy cracked the ground as it shook and rumbled toward the Guardian. The energy exploded around the beast.

Red and Blue scrambled out from where they took cover. "Wow. Holly, that was pretty amazing," Red declared.

"Yeah, she's amazin' a'ight," Blue agreed. "Sonic Fin!" he summoned a blue, somewhat dolphin tail shaped megaphone looking weapon.

"Hawk Blaster!" Red summoned a blaster with a small turbine and a definite bird of prey motif.

The two ran forward. They dodged around the monster throwing its scoop around trying to get them in retaliation for Yellow's attack. They jumped and fired at the same time. Blue sonic energy from the Sonic Fin as he shouted into it and red wind energy from the Hawk Blaster caused by the turbine exploded into the monster. The two Ranger sailed over its head as it sparked and smoked.

They landed in a crouch and Yellow ran up to them. "I think we all know what comes next," she declared.

"Yes. Let's put 'em together, guys," Red agreed and they joined their weapons together; Lion Hammer to Sonic Fin to Hawk Blaster. He held the weapon, and Blue and Yellow knelt to give him support.

"Storm Striker!" They declared.

"Ready!" Blue declared.

"Fire!" Red shouted and pulled the trigger. A ball of black energy with golden arcs of energy crackling around it shot toward the Guardian. It connected and the Guardian exploded.

They're morphs faded, they're weapons disappeared. "Dang, I wanted to study those a little longer," Danny complained.

"Me, too," Holly agreed.

Win gaped at them for a moment then turned toward the entrance of the mine. It had collapsed during the fight, but the rocks were rumbling. They suddenly exploded outward as a piece of intricately carved

white staff piece about a foot long flew toward them. It floated before them. "Well, I guess we did it," he said and reached out and grabbed the staff piece.

Nothing happened.

"A bit anti-climactic. Are we stuck here for the next three years?" Danny asked.

Holly shook her head. "Maybe we all need to touch it. Like a port key," she suggested.

"Of course the mystical Staff of Zordon is a time travelling port key," Danny declared and grabbed hold. Holly grabbed the piece as well. They winked out of existence like they never were.

-x-

Dustin scratched his head. "I'm confused," he said and jogged toward the old mine site. It no longer looked like a battle had been fought and won there. It just look like an old mine site, except the old excavator was gone.

The others followed and looked around as well. "It's very perplexing," Cam agreed.

"Perhaps none of our business," Blake suggested.

Shane nodded slowly. "Right. We'll pretend none of this happened and report in to Sensei," he declared. There was a moment of silence as the others looked around and considered this. "Right," they agreed and streaked away from the old mine site. Whatever had happened there was strange, to say the least, but they had other things to worry about. The invading forces of Lothor for one. Trying to explain to Sensei Kanoi Watanabe why they were late returning to Ninja Ops was another.

-xTo Be Continuedx-

## 26 - Dynamic Quest

### Angel Grove, 2006

Randi Scott was a ninja. A Thunder Ninja to be more precise. While her oldest brother was running around playing Power Ranger, and her twin brother was being recruited into Pai Zhua, Randi was getting recruited into the Thunder Academy. She even had a chance at playing Power Ranger herself. Being stuck on an alien planet with the famous Ninjor would do that for a person. Since those days, she's been a scout for the Academies, which were cooperating more than ever since the near invasion by Lothor. So she instigated herself into Jason's Dojo businesses for just that reason. What better way to spot potential ninja students than at a karate dojo?

She'd actually been fairly close to giving Chloe's and Danny's names to the Senseis but she hesitated when she realized that they were probably Power Rangers. Which ones, she wasn't sure until Zirynoc attacked and Chloe morphed. That Tai was revealed to be the male Red Ranger, or even Autumn as the female Green Ranger, was little surprise to her. But, seriously, Billie?

When she realized that the defenseless Rangers were in trouble, and it was serious trouble at that, she made the decision to help out. She didn't really mean to out herself, but Autumn recognized her voice and circumstances were what they were.

When the Rangers teleported the craggy rock-frog monster focused its attention on her. She honestly wasn't sure how long she could hold out against it. It was taking all her skills to stay ahead of his sonic hammer thingy. One blow actually got her pretty good and she was thrown off her feet.

Two people in dated armored suits resembling police cars appeared in front of her. One was green and white, the other was yellow and white. "Not so fast! Surrender yourself and be detained or face the consequences!" Green Senturion said.

Zirynoc just laughed a confident laugh. "I thinketh not," he said and threw a handful of Bone Drone eggs on the ground. The Drones appeared.

"They always want to do it the hard way," Yellow Senturion stated.

She and Green entered into the fight with them.

Randi sprang to her feet, scrambling for her sword to join in as well. As the Bone Drones dwindled, the sky suddenly gave a tremendous crack and giant Riti appeared in the park announcing her claims for world domination.

"They always want to rule the world," Yellow declared with a sigh. "Senturion Synergizer!" A plate in her leg armor opened up and a large pistol shaped energy gun popped out.

"You finish off the drones, we'll go after the monster," Green told the ninja after he summoned his



weapon as well. The two of them ran toward the monster trying to once again summon a devastating blast of sonic energy. They fired on him.

Randi didn't argue. They seemed to know what they were about. She adjusted her grip on her sword and gave a thin smile. She began running among the Drones, slashing with the sword and loosing crackling lightning. Whatever was going on with the Power Rangers, she sincerely hoped they'd sort it out soon. A single ninja and a couple of cops in outdated tech weren't going to be able to hold such a powerful monster at bay for too much longer.

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## **Starkweather Valley, 2012**

Taran, Autumn, Manny, and Chloe found themselves appearing at the fringes of a quaint little city surrounded on one side by foothills, and another by cliffs and the sea, the rest was flatlands and forest. The one defining feature of the town was a sharp peak in the distance.

"Hey, I know this place. It's Starkweather Valley. Our football team massacres theirs every year," Manny declared. "Not to mention their rubbish cheerleaders," she added.

Chloe made a square with her fingers and lined up the mountain. "Wish I'd've had time to grab my camera. Pictures from a different time. How awesome would that be?" she asked.

"Wonder exactly what time it is," Taran remarked.

Autumn surveyed the city below. "I suppose we could head into the city and find a newspaper," she suggested.

"But where do we go from there. We weren't exactly given a map," Chloe said and held up her little pink Ranger-shaped Morph Key.

Taran looked at his red Key as well. An urgent buzzing in his wrists made him twist them making his golden cuffs appear. The Morph Key glowed. The other Keys began to glow as well. Chloe twisted her wrists and her black cuffs appeared. Manny twisted her wrists and her yellow cuffs appeared. Autumn twisted her wrists and her green cuffs appeared.

The Morph Keys then bonded to their Morphers. Taran's cuffs turned red his Stegosaurus embossed Power Coin was replaced by one with a set of sharp wings or a bird. Chloe's cuffs turned pink and her Mastodon Coin was replaced with one with the symbol. Autumn's cuffs turned blue and her Stygimoloch Coin was replaced with one with a set of curly wings that resembled waves. Manny's cuffs didn't change color but her Smilodon coin was replaced by one with what looked a bit like a tulip with four leaves on it.

They twisted their wrists again and their cuffs disappeared. "As interestin' as that was, it doesn't really answer my question," Chloe said.

Taran rubbed his wrist. "Yes, it does. Looks like we're headin' toward the mountain," he said and pointed. "Or thereabouts," he added.

The foursome looked toward the mountain in the distance.

"Let's get moving then," Autumn said brightly and began walking toward the city. The others fell into step with her as they headed toward their destination.

-x-

The first clue to their present time wasn't a newspaper, but a bank sign that announced the date, temperature, time and a special interest discount on loans on a flat screen, digital display. "Huh, so we're in the future," Chloe said when the sign announced the date as 06/07/2012.

"Six years in the future," Manny declared. "Amazing," she said. "But this outfit must be so out of date," she said looking down at herself.

Chloe snickered. "I feel your pain, but luckily camo and flannel plaid is never in," she declared, and gestured over her shoulder at the two older Rangers.

"Ain't you just the sweetest thing," Taran drawled.

"I'll have you know that camo and flannel plaid is timeless. We're much more fashionable here than you two in your six-year-old trends," Autumn declared. She wrapped her arm around Taran's. "Which way now?" she asked.

Taran chuckled. "That way," he said, gesturing vaguely south.

"Whatever. We're all tacky," Chloe declared. "Though it'd be cool to take a few notes and get ahead of the trends," she said and wrapped an arm around Manny's in imitation of the couple and pulled her along ahead of the other two.

Manny laughed as she was pulled along. "Though, weirdly enough, the only thing I notice more than a few of is some kind of uniform," she said as she let go of Chloe's arm to shield her eyes and peer around.

"It's like we're babysitting," Autumn said.

"That ain't how it is. We're youse guys' chaperones. Ain't no tellin' what would happen if we weren't here," Chloe said, turning around and walking backwards as she teased them.

"Chloe, watch out," Taran warned but he was too late.

Before the words were even out of his mouth, her foot caught a crack in the sidewalk and she went flailing backwards. Strong arms caught her, but she was already in flight or fight mode. Unfortunately for her rescuer, Chloe rarely gave into the "flight" option. She reacted immediately. Her elbow met soft flesh of his middle, her foot hooked behind his leg, she grabbed his arm, and flipped him. He landed hard on his face, his arm pulled awkwardly and her knee in his back.

Sinclair Monning whistled. "I cannot wait to tell everyone you got put down by Pippi Longstocking," he told his friend, Gregory Houston.

Realizing almost immediately her mistake, Chloe let go of Gore and scrambled away from him. "I'm sorry. And thank you," she said.

Gore got to his feet. He brushed himself off and gave Sin a glare as he unsuccessfully stifled his laughter. "No harm, no foul," he said, shaking out his arm. The girl was small but she had a grip like steel. "And you cannot tell anyone," he told Sin.

"No promises."

Manny, Taran and Autumn joined Chloe. "Are you okay?" Autumn asked. Her eyes slightly unfocused as she looked at the two men. She read them instantly, powerful and elemental but in different ways. She blinked her eyes to focus normally.

"I'm okay. I'll just have to remember to quell my heroic tendencies in the future," Gore said good naturedly.

Taran smiled. "Don't do that. Not every tiny girl with braids has as many martial arts medals and trophies as she does," he said. "If you'll excuse us," he said in that slow, polite farm boy way he had. He and the girls skirted around them.

"Sorry again," Chloe called back, still completely mortified. Not only was just trying to help her, but he was seriously cute, too.

Manny couldn't help but laugh. "You know how to make an impression on a guy," she teased.

Chloe groaned. Autumn took pity on her and gave her a small squeeze. Chloe sighed and then scowled at Taran's back. "How much further?" she demanded moodily. The other three laughed at her, but she sank into a broody silence Nathan would envy.

-x-

Sin and Gore watched the little group. "Wasn't that that one guy?" Sin asked.

"You mean the one who hates being called the White Wizard? Sure looked like him," Gore agreed.

"Yeah, but younger, right?"

"It's weird. And I thought he was supposedly on another planet."

"Right? Maybe we should tell Doc and the others," Sin said. Gore agreed and they teleported back to Sky Base, an invisible island that hovered over Stark Peak.

-x-

Joining Gore and Sin in the main lab of Sky Base was Dr. Lark Walker, Taylor Hicks, Tempest Strong, Enrique Ramon, Mars Ramon and two of their newest allies, Erion Wyndesong and Rena Hart. Erion they'd found deep in a secret area of the base, asleep for over 10,000 years and a member of the alien race that had built the flying island. Rena had recently been possessed by the ghost of a space witch, who was also a member of the alien race that built Sky Base. She still looked like she'd been put through the ringer.

"Taran and three girls. One was a red-head, one was a pretty Latina and the other was small with dark braids," she said quietly, not asking a question, but repeating to herself. Sometimes her head hurt like a mug when she tried to think too hard. "Well, it's a given that the red-head was Autumn," she said. "The other two sound like Manny and Chloe. Which is weird. Manny's working with Rex at S.P.D. and Chloe's back in Africa taking pictures," she said and slowly got her to her feet. She went to a computer console and typed a few things in. One of which was a password that allowed her access to a very secret database.

Pictures began appearing on screens. Taran with slightly longer golden blond hair wearing a white outfit with a long cloak holding a tall white staff and a white circlet around his head was brought up against one of those cheesy studio pictures schools make you take of a shaggy haired farm boy in flannel, jeans, and work boots.

A picture of Autumn with fiery red hair hanging around her waist, a white sheath dress and a cloak and circlet similar to older Taran's appeared beside a snap shot of a laughing Autumn with short red hair and distinctive camo and combat boots.

A picture of Chloe holding a camera against the backdrops of the African Sahara, her brown hair cut short and breezy appeared beside a school yearbook picture of a Chloe with braids and a camera.

The last pictures were a picture of Manny in her S.P.D. uniform splashed with yellow and another yearbook picture of Manny in her cheerleading uniform for Angel Grove High School.

Gore nodded. "That's them all right. And I mean the younger versions. Who are they?" he asked.

Rena manipulated the keyboard again. The newer pictures of the foursome disappeared from the screens to be replaced with pictures of Power Rangers. "Chloe Kennedy was the female Mastodon Ranger," she said and a list of her training information, skills and abilities filled another screen.

"And this several years' worth of information?" Lark asked.

Rena shook her head. "No, this is the Chloe you guys met. I don't think she began her Pai Zhua training yet if what I'm thinking is right," she said.

"No wonder she took you down without missing a beat," Sin said to Gore.

"You weren't supposed to tell people about that," Gore grumbled.

"We would have found out," Taylor assured him. "Though that is quite an impressive record," he agreed.

"Manny Diaz was the female Smilodon Ranger," Rena continued and a dossier on Manny appeared. "Autumn Baker was the female Stygimoloch Ranger. And finally Taran Goldsmith was the Stegosaurus Ranger," she said.

"Where are you getting all this information?" Lark asked.

"From the Command Center's super computer. Say hello to everyone, Beez," she prompted.

A hologram of a young woman with dark hair, violet eyes and wearing a lavender and white outfit appeared. "Greetings. I am Beta Z," she greeted.

"You gave an outside computer access to our databanks?" Erion demanded sharply.

"On the contrary. I am allowing you access to my databanks. Your databanks have always been part of my network," Beta Z said with a serene and calming manner.

Ram got to his feet and circled around the holographic girl with keen interest. Mars tried to feign just as much interest, but truthfully, she'd met Beez before while working for Nodroz Corp.

"That's not possible," Lark said sharply.

"Unless..." Erion trailed off. Beez gave him a small nod.

"You are correct," she said. "I am the nexus of all Power Rangers on Earth and even beyond. My core is Eltarin even if this incarnation of me was created by three humans," she said with a slight smile. "But we're getting side-tracked," she said.

"It's about the grid going offline, isn't it?" Rena asked.

Beta Z nodded.

"What?" Tempe asked.

"In the past, bridges to the Morphing Grid powered out. If they aren't allowed to finish their mission, it may never be powered back up. I am sorry, but I can tell you no more than that," Beez said.

"But they did succeed. Right? I mean, we're here and we're Morphing," Tempe said.

"Time is fluid. It can always be changed," Beta Z answered. "There are Oozers appearing in the city below," she warned them just before the Alien Alert began to sound. She disappeared and all information she allowed them access to disappeared as well.

"We'd better go deal with this," Taylor said. He put a hand on Rena's shoulder. "Stay here and rest more," he said.

Rena gave a wan smile but didn't argue.

The seven Dynamic Power Rangers went to the teleport pad and disappeared, leaving her and Mars behind.

"Pull a seat, you can help me save them in the nick of time," Mars said with a smile. It was the role she'd taken over from her brother when he began his illustrious Power Ranger career. She returned the smile and sat down, but her strength wasn't computers.

-x-

Taran and the girls stopped off at a supermarket and stocked up on a few supplies for their trip, which they put in a backpack for him to carry. They didn't know how much longer they'd be wandering around the city and Taran was famished. He was downing his sixth power bar in as many minutes when green things began seeping up from the ground.

"Everybody else saw that, right?" Chloe asked.

"You mean the big snots with weapons? Yeah, I see them," Manny assured her.

"We have to get through them without getting caught up too much," Autumn said as they were surrounded, mistaken for easy pickings.

Chloe cracked her knuckles. "Human bowling ball time. Taran?" she prompted.

Taran got down on one knee. "I think you enjoy this too much," he told her.

"If youse got it, flaunt it," She said as she put on foot on his other knee. She bounced with her other foot and as she jumped, he lent his strength behind her. She densed and spread her arms wide. She crashed strongly into at least three Oozers, and started a chain reaction. She tucked herself into a ball and rolled to her feet after she hit the ground.

While Chloe was showing off, Manny was speeding through the creatures, hitting them with the strength of her speed behind her. "You're joining the cheer team next year," she declared.

"Not on your life," Chloe denied flatly. She wasn't incapable, but she had was not cheerleader material.

Autumn tried not to laugh at them. This was serious business. They were meddling in someone else's Ranger problem some years in the future because they'd been cut off from the Morphing Grid. She didn't succeed. She gave a snort of laughter before having to duck and doge an attack from the Oozers. She rolled backwards several times and found a piece of old pvc piping tossed near a dumpster of the convenience store. It was a bit larger than her staff but she gave it an experimental whirl and began whacking at the green things. Unlike her two juniors, she didn't have extra physical abilities, and she was not an alien. She was just Autumn who saw colors around things and people. But just Autumn was an expert martial artist, and she made sure that these things knew that.

Several voices overlapped as various explosions blew through the Oozers. Seven Power Rangers stood before them, one of them in bulky leonine armor. The Red Dynamic Ranger looked over his shoulder at the group. "Go save the future or whatever," he instructed. "We got this," he said.

"We'll owe you one," Taran said, not really surprised that future Rangers may have some idea of their mission here. Hopefully, they'll succeed.

"Remember you said that," Red said and dove back into the fray.

"Come on, ya'll. We gotta get going," Taran told the feminine trio. They began running away from the fight in the direction he was being led.

-x-

With Manny scouting ahead every few miles for any sign that they might be getting closer to their goal, the foursome was still going deeper and deeper into the Stark Game Reserve. "It must be some sort of unspoken rule that mysterious quest items have to be hidden deep in the wilderness," Chloe said with a sigh after they caught up with Manny for the bajillionth time.

"There's unspoken rules for everything," Taran said and passed out water again for them to drink.

"It'd probably save a lot of trouble if someone would speak them," Autumn said and made a face at her own lame joke. Manny and Chloe cracked up for some reason. "It wasn't funny," she told them.

"That's why it's funny," Manny told her. "Which way should I head?" she asked Taran once she'd gotten herself under control.

"Shouldn't be far now, but that way," he said, and gestured vaguely west. Manny nodded and dashed off in a blur. She was back within minutes. "There's something strange up that way," she said. "I don't know if it's the place we're looking for," she added.

"We'd better check it out any way," Taran said. They continued on their march. After nearly an hour or so, in a glade near the mountain and close enough to the sea to smell the salt and hear the crash of waves on the cliffs, there was an abandoned construction site of what looked to be a series of steel building for a compound of some sort.

Taran rubbed his wrist. "I think this is the place, everybody be on guard," he warned. Suddenly he was pushing them into the ground as a series of loud whistles erupted as an inordinately large drill bits crashed into trees and earth around them.

From among the abandoned, half-finished buildings, a larger than the average monster who looked like he was made from a power drill came whirring towards them.

"I think that's our Guardian," Autumn said quietly.

"I wonder what gave it away?" Chloe said.

"If you got time to be smart, you got time to fight," Taran said. "Manny, can you outrun those things?" he asked.

"I'll distract him. You guys morph," Manny answered. She sprang to her feet and dashed off, stopping occasionally to shout at the Guardian. She'd be gone before he even fired.

"We don't have a choice. We gotta chance it," Taran said as he helped Autumn and Chloe to their feet. He twisted his wrists making his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time!"

-x-

It took Mars awhile to trace the small band of time travelers, but once she found them, they were being viewed on a big screen in the Lab. "I don't recognize that area," Gore said.

"Me either," Sin said. "But mapping the Reserve isn't high on my list of priorities," he added.

"What is that?" Tempe suddenly asked when the drill-like Guardian made itself known.

"Not good," Lark said succinctly.

Taylor glanced at Rena. "Any idea how they're supposed to get past that?" he asked her.

She shook her head. "No idea," she said quietly, watching with wide eyes.

"Dude, I think we're about to find out. They got Morphers," Ram said. What came next was something of a shock to them all. Even Erion had to admit he had not expected such a thing.

-x-

Taran crossed his wrists and activated the Morph. "Red Ranger Power!" As he dropped his arms, a red and white power suit formed with gold wings emblazoned on the chest. A red dragon themed helmet formed around his head.

"Pink Ranger Power!" A similar, pink and white skirted suit formed around Chloe, with the same wing design emblazoned across her chest. The helmet that formed was phoenix themed.

"Green Ranger Power!" Autumn's green and white power suit didn't have a skirt, and the wings that appeared on her chest was more like waves. The helmet that formed around her head was crocodile themed.

Manny ducked behind a rather large redwood for cover and activated her Morpher. "Yellow Ranger Power!" The yellow skirted power suit that formed around Manny had different, more plant-like wings on the chest and the helmet that formed was tiger themed.

Red felt surprisingly light with his borrowed powers. He took stock of himself. Then he rushed forward toward the Guardian. It swung toward him, firing drill bits at him. He jumped and practically sailed through the air, then he dropped and rolled between the monster's feet and came up behind him, kicking him in the back.

Pink shook herself. "This is weird. I feel weird. I don't feel solid enough," she said.



"I feel too solid," Yellow said in a same tone of voice.

"Quit complaining and let's help Taran," Green said and the three girls took advantage of his distraction to initiate an attack of their own. The Guardian began to spin and disappeared into the ground.

"Oh, not good," Pink said.

"Cover!" Yellow and Red shouted at the same time as the Guardian spun out of the dirt, shooting wildly as he did so. They took cover again. "Let's give this a try," Red said. He pulled a card from his belt and swiped it in the device on his wrist that was shaped like a face but appeared to also be a card reader. "Sky Sword!"

"Good idea," Pink said, "Sky Shooter!"

"Land Claw!"

"Sea Staff!"

Individual weapons appeared from the cards each of them swiped. "Speed plus Claw. I got this," Yellow said and zoomed forward, she slashed at the Guardian. "Tiger Shock!" Static electricity left by the claw discharged and exploded around the creature.

Green spun the staff on the magnetic bands that appeared around her wrists. when she summoned the weapon. "This is neat," she said and ran forward and jumped. She jabbed the end of the Staff toward the ground and a jolt of green energy boosted her into the sky. "Croc Spear!" She flicked the staff toward the monster. A blade of green energy flew out of the end of the staff. She used the resistance to change trajectory and back flip away, landing in a crouch.

Pink began running. If she wasn't heavy, then she'd work with being light. "Brace yourself," she told Red. He crouched slightly. She jumped and he held out the base of his weapon. When her feet touched it, he used his strength to send her practically flying through the air. "Phoenix Shot!" She pulled the trigger, shooting pink energy bullets as she flew over. She tucked herself into a ball and hit the ground, rolling to a stop before springing to her feet.

Before the Guardian could process which way another attack was coming, Red was moving himself, almost right on the heels of Pink's lift off. He jumped high and crashed down, red energy slash shimmered briefly. "Dragon Blast!" The energy exploded into the Guardian as the Rangers regrouped.

When the dust cleared the whirring of the Guardian's drills sounded shrilly. He fired drill bits at them again and had them diving for cover once more.

"Anyone got any ideas?" Pink asked from her position.

Yellow peaked around and dashed away moments before where she was hiding behind a bush became mangled. "I get the feeling we're not suited for a cannon," she said when she paused again.

"Same here," Green said. "Taran?" she asked.

Red was sorting through some of the cards in his belt. "These," he said and held up two cards where they could see them. "Each of us should have a set," he said.

"On it!" the girls agreed and pulled cards from their belts as well.

Yellow swiped one of her cards. "Micro DynaZords! Tiger Dynazord!" A miniature tiger-head zord appeared. She swiped another card. "Snake DynaZord! Summon Core Earth DynaZords!" Two more cards swiped and more of the miniature Zords appeared. A black snake's head, an orange bear head, black beetle head with antler-like pincers, and yellow rhino with a drill for a horn.

Green began swiping cards as well. "Micro DynaZords! Crocodile DynaZord! Shark DynaZord! Summon Deep Sea DynaZords!" The green crocodile head was joined by a blue shark head, a cyan and white hammerhead shark, a cyan and gold swordfish head, and a black and cyan manta-ray head.

Pink brought out her only card and swiped it. "Micro DynaZord! Phoenix DynaZord!" A pink bird's head miniature zord appeared.

Red swiped his first card. "Micro DynaZords! Dragon DynaZord! Summon Sky High DynaZords!" First he summoned a red dragon's head, then a gold and red crane head, a red and white hawk's head, and a white and red crow's head appeared.

The small Zords zoomed around, crashing or biting into the Guardian before circling it in a dizzying array of multi-colored energy that seemed to trap it in a powerful net of energy. Four of the Zords broke off and zoomed back to them. They pulled their blasters from their hips and put the default heads on them. They pointed toward the energy net.

"Dragon Bullet!"

"Phoenix Bullet!"

"Crocodile Bullet!"

"Tiger Bullet!"

The foursome fired, the mini Zords balls of energy that collided with the energy net the others created. The explosion blew the Rangers off their feet, crashing them against trees, and bushes and buildings. But the Guardian was gone.

Their morphs, weapons, and miniature Zords disappeared as the girls got to their feet. "Where's Taran?" Chloe asked, looking around frantically.

"I'm here," Taran groaned as he jumped out of the branches of a redwood. "Doesn't anyone ever look up?" he asked.

"Where's the staff--oh," Autumn's question was cut off as the staff piece suddenly came into being where

the Guardian exploded.

"Welp, we'd better grab it and go," Taran said.

"And hope it takes us home," Manny agreed. The foursome took hold of the staff piece and disappeared in much the same manner as they had appeared.

-x-

From their vantage at Sky Base, the actual Dynamic Rangers had watched in fascination.

"Well, I'll say one thing. I looked good as a chick," Ram declared.

"Why thank you," Mars said. The twins were masculine and feminine versions of each other.

Sin glanced at Rena, "And you got to see that all the time?" he asked.

"Nope, most of the time I had to take monster attack procedures, which usually meant seeking shelter and not watching the action," she answered.

Suddenly the Alien Alert System began to sound. "A Ranger's work is never done," Taylor said. "Let's go," he said, and they piled into the teleport while Rena and Mars stayed behind for back up as they protected their city from invading alien forces.

-x-To Be Continued-x-

## 27 - Delta Quest

### Angel Grove, 2006

Saksor, the half monster, half saxophone, was having fun tearing through the busy airport parking lot of Angel Grove. He couldn't speak, but since he could literally toot his own horn, it didn't matter. The only hiccup since the Power Rangers powered down where the giant chameleon and a black figure throwing fire around.

He whipped around, looking for the chameleon, but it had disappeared. He gave a mirthful burble and turned his attention on the black clad figure, but she only left a crimson blur as she ran away. In anger, Saksor let out a deafening blast. An impact to his back caused him to crash into the ground.

Having just attacked him, a Pai Zhua master in orange, and a ninja in black stood behind him. "Thank, mate. Wasn't sure if I'd get enough strength on my own," she told her temporary ally.

The young man gave a teeth gleaming smile. "No worries," he assured. "I just came to visit family, not sure what exactly we just walked into," he said, looking up as Riti made her pronouncement.

"You walked into a war," Red Senturion said as he and Blue arrived on the scene. "Welcome to Angel Grove," he said, recognizing the young man as his own cousin, Nyo Kotze, the younger brother of Ifetayo Kotze.

"Better to leave this to the professionals now. For your own safety," Blue Senturion said. "Monster, this is your only warning to turn yourself in peacefully," he said in an authoritative voice.

Saksor faced the foursome and blew his horn. The sound met a wall of fire. "I got time to kill on my layover to Briarwood," Emily Bly, the Fire Ninja, said. She jumped as Saksor attempted to attack again.

"Senturion Synergizer!" Blue shouted and a lethal looking laser blaster popped out of his leg armor. "Then we'll be grateful for the help," he said.

Red nodded. "The more the merrier," he agreed and pulled his own Synergizer out of his armor. The four of them attempted to keep Saksor occupied and focused on them while they waited for the Power Rangers to save the day.

-X-

### New Tech City, 2025

Winking into existence in another time and place was mildly disconcerting. Especially since they had no idea when or where they were headed. None of them, not even Wood, had recognized the team the Morph Keys represented. They appeared on a ridge overlooking a city teeming with all sorts of lifeforms. The majority were human, but more than enough weren't.

"I can't believe it," Wood said in awe. "I think I know where we are," he said.

"Somewhere there's a lot of aliens, and time where they are openly living on Earth. Interesting," Lammy said. Being an alien herself, living with an assumed identity, she could somewhat appreciate such a time and place will exist. After all, not every alien species in the galaxy were bent on dominating and conquering other worlds.

"It's New Tech City, isn't it?" Tori asked, dazzled.

"Huh?" Nathan asked.

"I think so. In our time, it's just desert, an old ghost town where they're planning to build the S.P.D. facility," Wood said and pointed in the distance, to the center of the city, a gleaming glass and steel building could barely be seen with the Space Patrol Delta emblem on it.

"Oh," Nathan said and shrugged. He still had no idea what they were talking about. "Is that where we're headed?" he asked, eyeballing his little blue figure.

Wood held his up as well. "This is supposed to lead the way," he said. His wrists began to vibrate. "Huh?" He held his hands up and his yellow cuffs appeared. The Morph Keys began glowing. They each made their cuffs appear. The Morph Keys bonded with the Power Coins. Wood's cuffs turned red and his Smilodon emblem was replaced by an S.P.D. insignia. Tori's cuffs stayed pink but her pterodactyl was also replaced with an S.P.D. logo, the rose-gold color of Lammy's cuffs turned yellow and Nathan's pink turned blue. They twisted their wrists again and the cuffs disappeared.

"Well, now that's done, any idea which way to go?" Lammy asked, rubbing her wrists absently.

Wood nodded. He grinned at them. "That way," he announced, pointing toward the city.

Nathan grinned, too. "Good, maybe we can find a cantina to start a fire fight in," he said. Wood's grin widened. Tori giggled, but Lammy eyed them strangely. None of them bother to explain the reference as they began making their way off the ridge.

-x-

"Are you sure you're leading us and not wandering around in fascination?" Nathan asked Wood when it seemed like they'd passed the same spot for the third time. "I'm getting dizzy," he said. "From, you know, the circles we've been walking in," he added, making a circular motion with his finger to emphasize his point.

"Yes, we got it Nath," Tori said with a slight laugh.

Wood frowned. "I don't know. It is fascinating, but I can feel this tug and for whatever reason, we're going around in circles," he said, rubbing his wrist.

"More like a spiral. This is the only place we've passed more than once," Lammy said. She looked

around for anything out of the ordinary, but the whole city wasn't what she was used to in Angel Grove, everything looked out of the ordinary. But one thing was for sure, "This is the place where most of the aliens gather," she said.

"What do you mean?" Wood asked.

"I mean they're scattered all over the city but this is a little mecca. I see shops, food stalls, very few humans without a reason for being here, and every time we've passed, the people either hide, look extremely uninterested in us, or leave in a hurry," Lammy explained.

"You're an alien, can't you mingle or something and figure out why we're going around in circles?" Tori asked.

"You spent a lot of time aboard a spaceship where humans and aliens coexisted. You mingle," Lammy said.

"I would, except I haven't seen any of the species that are part of the Reaver Alliance," Tori said back.

"This probably isn't the part of town where human-friendly aliens hang out," Nathan pointed out.

Lammy sighed. "All right, but you guys cannot be weird about this. It'll hurt my feelings," she said.

"We've seen your parents, and Win when his mutations go wonky," Nathan said. Wood and Tori nodded solemnly.

Lammy sighed again, and her visage began to change. Her fingers lengthened into sharp tips, light brownish-gold interlocking exoskeleton began appearing over her skin. Her clothes changed to her black leather and gold armor, while the exoskeleton formed something of a tiara-like crest around her face, while her hair remained. Black feathery wings and an agile tail sprouted from her back. She rolled her head around on her neck. "Ah, this actually feels pretty good," she said. She didn't often take this form, especially while trying to blend in on Earth. It was something of a battle form.

"Ooh, a hot alien babe, how hideous," Tori said and gave an exaggerated shudder. Nathan and Wood chuckled.

Lammy gave a slight scoff and began walking again. "Come along human servants," she said imperiously. "Let's see if we can solve this mystery," she added. She gave wood a sidelong glance. "Any idea which way we should go?" she asked.

Wood held out his wrist and turned in a circle. He felt a buzzy sort of tug. "That way," he said. Lammy led the way through the street.

"Psst. Missy. Psst," a hiss came out of one of food stalls. Very bad smells were emanating from it and leathery, bird-like but not really, alien was gesturing to Lammy.

"Oh, wow," Tori held a hand over her nose. "Go see what he wants, we'll be right here waiting," she urged.

"Yeah, as far away from that smell as possible," Nathan agreed.

"Okay, but try not to get into trouble," Lammy said and headed toward the stall. "Yes?" she asked him.

"You look new around here so a piece of friendly advice, on the house even," he said and look around. "Don't walk around like that, as lovely as it is, if you don't want to get deported," he said.

Lammy crossed her arms over her chest. "Deported?" she asked.

"If you ain't registered, you get deported if you're caught. Trust me on this. Go back to trying to blend in with those human kids," he said.

"Thank you for the advice," Lammy said. She recognized his species. She held out a hand and opened it, a fist sized black egg appeared, floating a few inches above it.

"Oh, what is that? It smells worse month old hamburgers rotting in the desert," Nathan said, gagging. Tori was speechless, and Wood had to hide as he lost his lunch.

The alien, however was ecstatic, "Where did you get that?" he asked he reached for it. Lammy pulled it out of his reach.

"This isn't a token of my appreciation for the free advice. This is of you can give me any information," she said.

The alien sunk back and looked around suspiciously. "This isn't some kind of trick is it?" he asked. "You ain't workin' with those Power Rangers are ya?" he asked.

"If you don't want it, that's fine," Lammy said and began to close her hand.

"Wait! Okay, Missy. What do you want to know? Ol' Piggy should be able to help," he said in an oily manner.

"Do you know anything about recent temporal disturbances, or any objects that look like they could be pieces of a white staff?" she asked. Her other hand gave a tap of the egg and sent it spinning.

Piggy stared at it with rapt attention. "S.P.D. dogs have quarantined an area outside of the city a bit. Seems that anyone that gets close to it, gets attacked by some sort of unknown creature. I hear rumors that it's guarding a white stick," he said and reached out and grabbed the egg. "Shops closed!" he barked at his customers and closed his window.

Lammy headed back to her friends, reassuming her usual human appearance. "If the locals are interfering, then that might explain why we're going around in circles. Or it could mean that we aren't to find it just yet," she said after explaining what she found out.

"What was that thing with the stink?" Nathan asked.

"I recognized his species. They will literally sell their grandmothers but they always have information. That egg was a rare delicacy from his planet. Only the richest could afford it," she explained.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to smell again," Wood declared, rubbing his nose. He had a more distinct tug in his wrist now and began to lead them away from the alien community. Except they didn't get too far when five people in uniforms appeared before them.

"That's far enough. We're with S.P.D. we need to ask you a few questions," the young man in the red splashed suit announced.

"Uh-oh," Nathan said and held up his hands. Wood followed suit.

Tori put her hands on her hips. "And what exactly are you questioning us about?" she asked. "Walking down the street?"

"We need to check your registration status," the girl in yellow told Lammy and pulled a device. "Please state your name, species, and planet of origin," she said.

Lammy reasoned at this point in time, given what was happening in their present, she was probably in their database. "Lammy Goldsmith. Rachnaemance-Wolzyd, and I was born on the moon," she announced.

"Shiny," the young man in the green said, waving his hands in front of his face. He gave a slight laugh to himself.

"Bridge," the young man in blue said in a scolding tone.

Elizabeth "Z" Delgado looked up at Lammy with a slight frown. "This lists your current residence as Angel Grove. Is that correct?" she said.

Lammy nodded. If she was right about what was hidden somewhere in Angel Grove, there would no need to leave once she found it. "Correct. Now what's this all about?" she asked. She slid her eyes to the girl in pink. There was something about the girl that was making her senses tingle. Not in a dangerous way, just a curious sort of way.

"We're not aliens, by the way," Nathan spoke up.

"Did he just say we were shiny?" Tori asked, eying Bridge Carson.

"Like in an Autumn sort of way," Wood confirmed with a nod.

"We heard you talking with Piggy. What do you know about the monster and the staff piece?" Sky Tate said

"That's classified," Tori stated.

"Yeah, like super-mega classified," Nathan agreed with a nod.



"This isn't game we're playing with you kids," Jack Landors stated.

"Kids? If you're older than me, I'll eat my shirt," Nathan responded. Jack puffed out his chest, offended.

"Okay, okay," Syd Drew said. "But you are civilians, and we're S.P.D. so there's really not much of a choice here," she said. "We'll ask you to come along quietly and answer our questions, or the alternative," she said.

Wood rubbed the bridge of nose. He wasn't sure what the best play was here. No one bothered to tell them what to do if they ran afoul of the current time's authority or "Power Rangers," he said. "We're Power Rangers," he stated. "From the past," he added. "We're looking for that staff piece to save the Morphing Grid," he added.

"What happened to super-mega classified?" Nathan asked.

"When in doubt, tell the truth," Wood said with a shrug. "Besides, I'm pretty sure they're this time's Rangers," he added in a whisper.

"Power Rangers from the past. Right. Let's take them to headquarters," Jack said.

"I don't think you have time if those are what I think they are," Wood said, pointing over their shoulders as mechanical creatures began to appear on the streets.

"If they're the same things as that, then they probably are what you think they are," Bridge agreed, pointed over their shoulders.

"Oh, great. He resold information," Lammy sighed. She ducked as a Krybot attacked. The S.P.D. B-Squad Rangers had to start defending themselves as well and keep an eye on these self-proclaimed time-traveling Power Rangers.

"Let's try not to get too tangled up in this fight," Wood said as he sprung away from an attacking minion, only to bounce up again, as if he were hopping from trampoline to trampoline. He landed in a crouch by a food stall that reminded him a sashimi restaurant. "Can I borrow these? Thanks!" He said and took the sharp edged spatula the now cowering alien cook has been using. He began defending himself using them in a similar manner to his daggers as he bounced around.

Tori waited calmly as several of the androids came upon her with her hands on her hips. "You guys are going to regret this," she warned them. They paused warily but then continued to come at her. "You were warned," she said and shrieked at them, the sound blast hitting them with an unexpected force that also had them sparking and twitched. She cartwheeled through them, occasionally stopping to kick or punk, or even toss over her shoulder when she deemed it necessary. "Never mess with a cheerleader," she said.

At first Nathan didn't go high. Going high was more useful when he had a weapon. Instead he crouched and rolled, looking for something he could use. He spotted it when he came face to face with a couple of alien kids hiding. There was a sling-shot on the ground near them. "Perfect. I'm borrowing this," he said

with a grin.

He scooped up the slingshot and a handful of the sharp-looking rocks they were using for ammo. He rolled to his feet, put most of the rocks in his pocket but kept a handful as he began to use the rocks against the Krybots.

He got their attention. He ran forward, doing a one-armed hand spring, landed on the shoulders of one of them, fired a few more shots, kicked his host in the head and jumped, hovering as he gave his friends some cover, occasionally even helping the uniformed officers.

Lammy threw a handful of energy small energy balls at the Krybots, but realized that if she missed, she'd damage the small community. "Dang," she said, imitating her brother's drawl. She ducked and rolled, coming to feet with a long, thin metal tube that belonged to a food stall in the middle redoing some plumbing. "En garde!" she said, jousting forward with the pipe, jabbing and swiping with ease and skill.

"Come on, guys. This way," Wood said, finally scouting an escape route. The other travelers joined up with him and they dashed away from the scene, leaving the era's Rangers to deal with their enemies.

-X-

The good news seemed to be that the four of them weren't walking around in circles anymore, but the bad news seemed to be that New Tech City was a lot bigger than they anticipated. It was also laid out in a haphazard manner as the city expanded over the years. But they finally made it out to the desert, where Nathan dramatically collapsed on the sandy ground. "I need sugar," he moaned.

Tori sighed and sat down on his butt, making him grunt. "And you call yourself a gymnast," she sniffed.

"Hey, I even beat Rex this year. I deserve a little sweet," he said, propping his chin on his hand, looking around.

Lammy held a hand over her eyes and scanned the horizon. "I'm not seeing anything unusual," she said. "Instead of wallowing on the ground, how about a bird's eye view?" she suggested to Nathan.

"Would if I weren't being used as a throne," he answered.

Wood chuckled and held his hands out to help Tori bounce to her feet. Nathan rolled to his back and sprang up. He jumped again and levitated. "I see it now. It's a little way where it looks like they're trying to build one of those gated communities. There are personnel milling around. Looks like we'll have to go deeper into it to find what we're looking for," he said and his feet touched the ground again.

"So, we have to get past the guards and wander around in a cookie-cutter neighborhood for a while," Lammy said. She cracked her knuckles. "Let's go," she said.

Nathan sighed and gazed in the direction he'd indicated. "Can't you like, poof us over there?" he asked her.

"That'd be so awesome," Wood agreed. "My feet are kind of killing me," he said.

"It doesn't work that way. Come on, let's go," she said.

"Coming," the other three chorused tiredly and began to drag themselves behind her.

-x-

What Nathan hadn't seen was familiar faces joining the guards at the construction site. The B-Squad Rangers, anticipating that the foursome that had run away might make their way here. "What's the deal with this place again?" Syd asked, looking around at the planned community with a slight frown.

"There's a monster here," Z answered.

"Then why don't we just go defeat it?" Jack asked.

"We have orders not to interfere and only observe from a safe distance," Sky stated.

Z frowned. "The time-traveling Power Rangers?" she asked.

"Doggy probably knows more about this than he's letting on," Jack said with a frown. "Do we really believe that they're time-traveling Power Rangers?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Sky said.

"I don't know. They had unusual abilities, like us," Syd said.

"So I wasn't only one who saw the flying person?" Bridge asked. "I believe them," he said. "Let's call back the other guards," he suggested.

"You can't be serious," Sky said, slightly appalled.

"I agree with Bridge. There's something, I can't put my finger on, about the alien girl, Lammy. I think we should trust them," Syd said decisively.

"Me, too. If I allow myself to think they are from the past, I think we should give them a shot to accomplish whatever it is they're here to do," Z said, she had an eerie sense of familiarity with the kid with the afro and the girl with her distinctive colored eyes.

Sky looked at them like they'd lost their minds. He glanced at Jack. "Please tell me you aren't going to go along with this," he said.

Jack paced for a moment as he thought. Finally, he clapped his hands together. "Okay, let's do it. Clear the way. Observe without being seen. Don't jump in before we have orders otherwise," he said. Sky threw up hands but they began to take the necessary steps to evacuate their personnel.

-x-

"I thought you saw guards," Wood commented to Nathan as they finally entered the community site. He definitely had a more definitive sense of where they were headed, and they were close. He could feel it.

Nathan shrugged. "Maybe they're on break or something," he suggested.

"Yeah, because that makes perfect sense," Tori said. Nathan shrugged again. He couldn't tell what he didn't know.

"Whatever happened, let's just be on guard," Lammy said.

"You're the one with the spidey senses. We'll take our cues from you," Nathan said quietly.

"Why are you whispering?" Lammy asked.

Nathan glanced around warily. "It's a little too quiet around here," he answered. "Okay, gang, let's not split up," he suggested. "I'm pretty sure an episode of Scooby-Doo started like this," he declared.

"I'm pretty sure every episode of Scooby-Doo started like this," Tori declared.

"Nah, sometimes it was night-time out in the wilderness," Wood corrected them.

"Except there won't be an old man Jenkins in a mask at the bottom of this mystery," Lammy added, surprising the other three. "Finster likes to watch cartoons in his lab," she said by way of explanation.

"Jinkies," Tori couldn't help but interject.

Their good spirits were quickly squashed as they came upon the center of the community where a park was being built. A kids' playground had many half-finished projects. One of pile of junk they could have dismissed as the supplies for a monkey bars or geo dome suddenly began to move and assemble itself into a monster larger than a house that seemed to part antenna-part satellite dish.

"Zoinks!" Wood and Nathan exclaimed at the same time. They all went scattering for cover when the monster began firing laser beams at them.

"Well, I think we're at the right place finally," Nathan said loudly.

"Anyone see the staff piece?" Tori asked from her hiding place.

"It's at the top of the slide," Lammy said.

"The slide on the other side of the playground with the monster between us and it?" Wood asked, peeking out.

"That's the one," Lammy agreed.

"We're not going get past it without Morphing," Tori said.

"Agreed. Let's do it," Wood said. He twisted his wrists and stood up. "It's Morphin' Time! S.P.D. Emergency! One!" He brought his cuffs together and activated the Morph. "SPD Red Ranger!"

Lammy, Nathan, and Tori made their cuff appear as they stood.

"Two!" Nathan brought his cuffs together. "SPD Blue Ranger!"

"Four!" Lammy brought her cuffs together. "SPD Yellow Ranger!"

"Five!" Tori finished out the sequence. "SPD Pink Ranger!"

The suits that formed for them were mostly solid colors, except white and black color blocking formed number on the left sides of their torsos and arms. Silver belts and helmets with angular visors and silver mouthpieces finished out the transformation. They had a side weapons on each hip.

This surprised the cadets watching. "They can't do that? Can they?" Z demanded and almost stepped out.

Jack stopped her. "Stop. Just continue to watch for now," he said.

"We'll arrest them afterwards," Sky stated.

Syd gripped her Delta Morpher. "For what? It's not like they stole these or anything," she said.

"Power Rangers from the past," Bridge said simply, "use powers from the future." He shook his head.

Meanwhile, said Power Rangers from the past now had sabers in their hands they pulled from their holsters. Except Red, who had two blasters in his hands.

Blue's was long but he'd recently began to learn to use a sword, well a wooden stick, so he wasn't totally ill-prepared. It had actually been Tai's idea that while mastering their individual weapons, they should all be familiar with the basics of using a sword. He wasn't sure how handy it would be against the oversized Guardian, but he went for it. The Guardian began firing at him, but used the saber to knock aside the fire as his feet frequently left the ground.

He managed to get in close, slash at the Guardian but he was thrown off his feet. He managed to correct his trajectory to land on his feet. "It's a good thing I can fly," he said, resting his hands on his somewhat shaky knees.

Yellow's saber was thin and shaped somewhat like her VelociRapier, but a little shorter, but she managed to compensate. She put on a kick of speed, dodging laser fire and jabbed him several times before back flipping away.

Pink's saber was similar to Yellow's, but slightly longer. While Yellow was drawing fire, she used the opportunity to attack at the same time.

Red was using his Delta Blaster to give them some cover fire as he leapt around. Getting fed up, the

Guardian's dish-like head began to emit a high frequency sound and suddenly began hurling giant laser blasts from it. They all took cover.

Blue, Yellow, and Pink drew their other side arms. "Delta Strikers!" they put the sabers and the blaster bases together to form a single, long barreled laser weapon each.

Red put his Blaster's together "Delta Blaster Combo Mode."

They popped out of their covers at the same time, "Fire!" They aimed at the Guardian and powerful lasers were fired at him. They exploded around him.

"Did we win?" Red asked into the silence that followed.

A volley of laser suppression fire gave them the answer and had them diving for cover.

"Hey, Lammy, can't you throw a spirit bomb at it or something?" Blue called to her.

"First and second, I'm not Goku and this isn't an anime," Yellow answered. "But, mostly, since this thing was created by Zordon, arguably one of the powerful beings in the galaxy, my magic wouldn't make a scratch on it," she said.

"Does this team have a cannon?" Pink asked.

"As a matter of fact it does!" Red said and got to his feet and threw something in the air that resembled a metallic bone or dumbbell. A robot shaped like a dog streaked through, jumping up in the air to catch the bone in its jaws. "Canine Cannon!" It transformed into cannon with twin barrels.

The Power Rangers converged under it. and supported it. "Fire!" They said at once and this time when the laser blasts hit the Guardian, it didn't return fire.

The cannon disappeared and so did their Morphs. "Well, I guess that was that," Tori said. "Let's get the staff piece and go," she said.

"I couldn't agree more," Lammy said.

"Then what are we standing around for?" Nathan asked.

"Good question," Wood said. They all got into motion at the same time, running to the slide where the Staff piece was still hovering peacefully.

Nathan levitated just enough to grab it. He held it out as his feet touched the ground again. Each of them grabbed hold and they winked out of that time and place as if they were never there.

Except for the witnesses. All seven of them.

"I can't remember the last time I jumped around like that," a male voice said from behind where the B-Squad Rangers had been watching with rapt attention.

"Me either. I feel old just watching that," a female voice agreed.

B-Squad turned with a start and saluted an older couple in high ranking uniforms. "Sir, Ma'am," they greeted bewildered as for some reason the Commanders in charge of the junior cadet training and facilities were standing around as well. Until it hit them.

"I knew they were Power Rangers from past," Bridge declared. The others were still trying to wrap their heads around seeing their superiors as teenagers, except Z, who was just smirking since she'd figured it out first.

"Come on. There's no need to report to Doggy about this," the man with the long dreads said. His wife with her aquamarine eyes winked at them as they started back toward the S.P.D. facilities. They followed.

**-x-To Be Continued-x-**

## 28 - Morphin' Quest

### Angel Grove, 2006

Moriko and Rei found that locating Zita was fairly difficult. Even though Zita didn't know where she should even go now, so she was wondering around Angel Grove, dressed like an ordinary girl in jeans and a purple hoodie. If they didn't know her, no one would suspect the disgruntled girl was in fact the very same Zita that had wreaking havoc for the past few months. Somehow, she'd made a full circuit and ended up back at the cherry trees.

Grandpa was there tending to them. "They'll be okay, Akira-san. They are strong," she said quietly from behind him. She knelt to help him spread something she thought was fertilizer. "Are you unharmed?" she asked.

Akira grunted. "*It would take more than that space witch to take out a Watanabe,*" he answered. He patted the trunk of one of the trees and smiled a smile full of happy memories as he thought of his late wife. He glanced at Zita. "*And you, Zita-san?*" he asked.

"What about me?" she grumbled and stood up again. She dusted herself off.

Akira straightened up as well. "*The Zita that has been antagonizing my home and plaguing my grandson for these long months would not simply give up and be ousted from her own home. She would not let herself be beaten for one set back,*" he said.

Zita pouted. "You're not wrong, but what can I do. With that piece of Soul Stone she has, there's nothing I can do her. My power is nothing next to it," she admitted and hated doing so.

Akira suddenly gave her the look. It was the look that almost every Ranger had received from Tai at some point over the past few months. Zita's response was to try not to fidget and jutted her chin out defensively. "*From my understanding, Zita-san, you are not alone,*" He glanced over her shoulder. He gave her a bow, then bowed to her two sisters as they came up behind her. He took his leave from them and headed back to his house.

Zita clenched her jaw and turned to face them. "What?" she asked belligerently and struggled to pretend that the old man wasn't making sense.

"We've been looking for you everywhere," Moriko complained as they came to a stop.

"It's a good thing we know an expert tracker," Rei added.

Zita raised a brow. "I don't see an expert tracker," she said.

Moriko tried to suppress an eye roll. "He went to the Moon to start figuring out a way to rescue Finster," she said.



"I hope his brain doesn't melt with all the thinking he'll required to do," Zita grumbled.

Moriko clenched her teeth and smiled so that she wouldn't say anything she would regret. Rei sighed. "Anyway," she said loudly to head off what might end up as a fight, "we need to put our differences aside to get rid of that," she said, pointing to the giant, super-powered Riti in the distance.

Zita and Moriko looked up. "Yeah. Someone has to stop her," Moriko agreed.

"And how do you propose we do that? I'm not exactly interesting in saving the planet I've been trying to conquer," Zita said.

Rei ignored her. "The Power Rangers are on a quest. Their allies are keeping Riti's monsters occupied until they return. Even so, they won't have enough power to defeat Riti. Only we will and only if they succeed," she said.

"How do you mean?" Moriko said.

"There are three things we'll need. The most important thing is each other. The three of us are no longer together. Our power is no longer being stifled. I don't remember how powerful you were with us inside you, but since being free, I keep growing in strength little by little," Rei looked at Zita.

"Me, too," Moriko said.

Zita glowered, then tossed her head. "I was weaker at first, but I've regained that power and more since then," she admitted. Rationally, she knew that teaming up with her sisters was the right move, but she felt backed into a corner. Rei was her enemy and Moriko was times her best friend and most annoying person she'd ever met. She was a little afraid of joining with them again. She was only just now beginning to rediscover herself after separating from them. She wasn't happy with everything she was discovering. "What are the other two things?" she asked.

Rei gestured to the threes. "This is where we will make our stand," she said.

"And the third? Something we only get by depending on the Power Rangers?" Moriko prompted.

Rei smiled. "Have you ever heard the legend of the White Wizard?" she asked.

"A fairytale is the last thing we'll need?" Zita demanded. She shook her head. "I must be insane to even be listening to you," she said and turned to leave.

"The White Wizard wields a staff. The Power Rangers are questing for the pieces of a staff," Rei said.

Zita slowly turned back around. "Zordon's Staff? The Power Rangers are going to have Zordon's staff?" she demanded and sucked in a breath.

Moriko's eyes went wide. "Then the White Wizard--"

"Will have many things to do, but one of them will be to help defeat Riti and Rio," Rei answered.

Zita nodded. She didn't like the dependence on white magick, but what choice did she have? "Okay then. Let's figure out a way to get Riti here for a showdown," she said and held out a hand, signaling her willingness to team-up with them.

Moriko beamed and clasped her wrist. Rei let out a slow breath. She reached out and clasped Moriko's wrist. Zita wrapping her hand around Rei's wrist not only joined them in this venture, but formed a magical triad. Smoke whished around them as they changed their appearances from ordinary girls, to magical sisters. As one they began to speak a magical spell.

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## **Angel Grove, 1994**

The city was peaceful, the cars were blocky, and the clothes were baggy when Tai, Billie, and Melody arrived wherever they were headed. Given the Morph Keys they held, they guessed the 1990's. The city they knew. It was home. Home a decade or so in the past, but home nonetheless. They landed somewhere around Angel Grove Park, but there was a completely different feel to it than they were used to.

"No laptops, no cell phones, a phone booth? I can't even process what I'm seeing," Billie shook her head in horror.

"That guy has a cell phone," Mel said, gesturing to a middle-aged man in a leisure suit walking his tiny dog.

"That's not a cell phone. That's a cinder block," Tai said. "I think it weighs more than his dog does," he said. "I'm glad I was a kid and had never even heard words 'mobile technology'," he added.

"Me, too," Mel agreed.

"Speak for yourselves," Billie commented sourly. "All right, leader boy, what now?" she asked.

"Since we weren't given Power Morphers for this little adventure, it's probably a safe bet that these enable us to Morph," he said, holding up his key. Sure enough, he felt his wrists begin to vibrate. He twisted his wrists and made his cuffs appear. The Key bonded with his Morpher. Nothing changed but he could feel something was different.

Billie made her cuffs appear and the yellow Key bonded with her cuffs, making them turn yellow and her Power Coin turned from her faithful triceratops, to the unfamiliar Smilodon. "Still not understanding this change-up," she declared.

Mel made her communicator appear, and another cuff formed around her other wrist. The pink Key bonded with them, turning them pink and formed a pterodactyl Power Coin. They twisted their wrists again making the cuffs disappear. "Maybe it's logistical. The Power Daggers are more like your Power Sai than the Power Lance," she suggested.

Tai was silent, rubbing his wrist and looking to the east. "I think I know where we're headed," he said.

"Where?" Mel asked.

"The Command Center? Would the staff piece really be in such an obvious place?" Billie asked.

Tai shrugged. "We won't know 'til we get there. Don't suppose you could whip up a flying car for us?" he asked.

"That's more Danny's thing, and he's like six right now," Billie answered.

"Looks like we're hoofing it," Mel commented.

Billie frowned. "Surely even a six-year-old Danny can make a car fly. Let's go find him," she said.

Tai snorted. "No can do. We'll stop and pick up some supplies, but we're taking a hike," he said.

"Do you know how far the Command center is from Angel Grove? And what kind of terrain we have to cover?" she demanded.

"That's what the supplies are for. Come on. It'll be good for you," Mel said chipperly and headed out. Tai began to follow, practically dragging Billie behind them.

-x-

They bought backpacks, water, granola bars, and other just in case supplies from an outdoor supply store in the mall that had been there as long as any of them could remember. Tai and Billie had to change into clothes and shoes more suitable for a cross-country hike than going to a cultural festival or schlepping around the lab. Mel and Zara had been planning to camp out and do some training, so she was prepared for an adventure of this sort.

"We should probably find some caffeine for Billie. I don't want to die in the middle of the wilderness because she ran out of potion and turned into a killer bear," Melody said as they spilled out of the store.

Billie wrinkled her nose. "Hey, that's...a really good point," she said as she stuck her arms through her backpack straps.

"We'll grab some instant coffee at a convenience store. Unless the schedule has changed in the last decade, we need to catch the ten-twenty bus in front of the pharmacy on Bradbury and Elm to get to the foothills and start east," Tai said.

Billie made a face at the thought of instant coffee and lukewarm water, but decided not to argue. "Lead the way, leader boy," she prompted.

Tai paused and glanced back at her. He started to say something, but changed his mind and started walking. Billie smirked. Mel held back a giggle and they started behind him. After a brief stop at the

nearest convenience store, they boarded their bus. Billie took the time to caffeinate. Plugging her nose and holding her breath, she managed to down the entire bottle of grainy, bitter coffee flavored water. She shuddered when she was finished.

Melody shuddered as well. "How can you do that?" she asked.

"You have be Glitch," Tai answered for Billie. She gave him a disgruntled look and it was his turn to smirk.

Mel just nodded. She pulled out a map. "I know it's not on a map, but we should probably decide the best route to take. I know we have to go over these foot hills here," she said, pointing, "before we can head out to the desert, but which path is best?" she asked.

Tai glanced at the map and squinted. Without asking, he removed Billie's glasses from her face and found the best distance to be able to use them without going completely blind himself. "Here," he said, pointing to a trail. "It's little used because it's kind of tricky and only for the most experienced hikers, but Rex and I have gone over it with Grandpa on many occasions," he explained.

"What do you mean by tricky?" Billie demanded, snatching her glasses back.

"Don't worry, Billie. Since Tai is familiar with it and it can't be any worse than some of the jungle paths I've trekked on Mirinoi, we'll get you through it," Melody assured her.

Billie nodded. "All right. So, then what, wander around the desert until something happens?" she asked.

"Basically," Tai answered.

"You're not exactly inspiring anyone with confidence here," Billie grumbled. She sat back in her seat and waited for the bus ride to be over.

-X-

The site was pretty busy when the trio arrived. The Angel Grove foothills were a big draw for campers and hikers. "Wow. There are a lot of crazy people that do this for fun," Billie declared.

Tai nodded.

"I was including you in that statement," she added.

"I didn't do it for fun. You might complain about the trip, but be glad you have shoes and not a backpack full of rocks while swinging around a wooden sword," Tai stated as he led the way.

Mel gawked up at him. "Wow, Grandpa doesn't kid around, does he?" she mumbled.

"Not when it comes to training," Tai said.

"Well, I can definitely say I'm very glad you never took a page a page from Grandpa's training manual

when you were training Mina," Billie said.

"It was coming," Tai said. "I was looking forward to it," he added. "I think evil me was a bit of a sadist," he said, frowning now.

Mel nodded. "You guys were kind of scary," she agreed.

Tai cleared his throat and started walking. "Enough reminiscing about the bad times," he said as he led them toward the direction they needed to go.

They came to a split in the trail they were taking. One trail led to an easier, if still challenging path, and the other led the way they needed to go. Unfortunately, when they got there, they weren't alone. "Oh, crap," Tai uttered as they encountered six technicolor teenagers with all too familiar faces debating which path they should take.

"Come on, you guys. We can't split up. This might be our last camp out together," the bubbly girl in pink told her friends.

"I tend to agree with that assessment. Though my hiking abilities have more than enough for improvement, surely I can take the tougher path if we all stick together," a gawky young man in blue denim overalls said with the same face he still had over a decade later.

"I'm cool with whatever we choose," the black guy in baggy hiking shorts said with a good natured smile.

"Me, too. But I think the easier path would be more enjoyable. This isn't meant to be a challenge," the Asian girl in yellow said with a soft smile.

"That's a good point," a long-haired teenager with a green shirt tied around his waist stated.

Solidly built and frowning thoughtfully, the teen in red nodded slowly. "Okay. We'll take it then. Trini's right. The point isn't the challenge, it's hanging together for the last time, the six of us," Jason Lee Scott agreed. He looked up at the trio who joined them on the trailhead and gave them welcoming smiles. "Hi. Sorry if we're blocking the way," he said. The other teenagers looked up at them.

Tai quickly shook his head and tried to stop gawking. "It's fine," he said, and he was really hoping they would agree to take the easier path. "We'll just be going then," he said, trying to interact with them as little as possible.

Mel gave a smile and friendly wave and scurried along behind Tai. She grabbed Billie's arm to drag her along with them. They didn't get very far.

Z-Putties began appearing all around the trailhead. "Oh, great," Billie said. They had all nine of them surrounded. They weren't going to be able to escape without fighting.

"Get behind us," Jason called to them as the six original Power Rangers rushed forward to engage the Putties, who were clearly after them. But just like the future, past Putties didn't mind collateral damage and tried to attack the trio as well.

Three of them went after Billie but she disappeared. While they fumbled over themselves in confusion, each of them were smacked in the Z causing them to crumble.

"Going invisible might not have been the best move in the situation," Tai told her after throwing a Puttie in his comrades. He pulled a telescopic baton out of his backpack and began using it using as a substitute for a sword.

"Well, you taught me to use my strengths," she pointed out.

Melody also had a telescopic baton, but she was relying mostly on her martial arts rather than the weapon. "We're getting funny looks," she said to them.

"I know," Tai grumbled. "You and Billie hurry ahead of me, I'll hold off the Putties before joining you," he said.

The two girls regrouped and ducked behind Tai and hurried along the trail. Jason made his way over to Tai. "Who are you?" he demanded. Before Tai could answer, he reached out, and swung Jason behind him, kicking a Puttie in the chest that was about to take off his head.

"Just a tourist passing through," he said to Jason's shocked face. "And, a bit of advice, get your friends to cover. Now," he said and ran to a rather large tree and kicked it with every ounce of his enhanced strength. The tree creaked in warning. While Jason got his friends to cover, the Putties were mostly squashed and the mysterious trio disappeared down the trail.

"Who were they?" Kimberly Hart asked in the aftermath.

"I don't know, but where there are Putties, there's big trouble," Tommy Oliver said with a frown.

"We need to regroup on the Command Center," Trini Kwan declared.

"I concur," Billy Cranston agreed.

"What do you think, Jason?" Zack asked.

Jason was looking up the trail with a thoughtful expression. "Yes. Let's go," he said finally, and they teleported to the Command Center to deal whatever plans Lord Zedd had for them at the moment. The mysterious trio could wait. He didn't think they were a threat and the guy had saved his skin.

-x-

The trail had been exhausting. At least for Billie. She was far from the outdoorsy sort. Even Melody had a little trouble with it. Tai fared a little better, but using his strength on that tree before had drained him. At some point when rocky terrain began turn more and more sandy, they decided to stop and eat some of the granola bars they brought along.

Billie groaned. "My legs feel like they're going fall off," she said. "Are we sure the cosmic Powers That

Be chose the right person to be a Power Ranger?" she asked.

"You can always give me your Power Coin and just be tech support," Melody suggested.

"Not on your life," Billie snarled making the other girl laugh. "Though, what's all that crap the Phantom Ranger was touting about the three of us being special?" she asked. "I mean, me I understand, I'm a genius who almost took over the world," she said. "But what about you two?" she asked.

"No idea. I thought Rex was Destiny Boy, not me," Tai said and downed a bottle of water.

Melody shrugged. "Don't really know. I'm not even technically a Power Ranger yet," she said and looked at her right hand. She hissed slightly as the pattern in her hand showed up briefly.

"What was that?" Billie asked, grabbing her hand and looking at it.

Mel shook her head. "Not really sure. It's a mark that got left there when I touched the Pink Quasar Sabre. It hurts whenever it shows up, which it does for no reason," she added, rubbing her hand, now vaguely tingling as it disappeared.

Tai was now gazing off into the distance. "Phantom Ranger always knows more than he lets on, and no amount of asking will get us anywhere. We just have to wait and see. We'll know one day," he said. "We need to get moving. We're close. If not to the Command Center, then our destination," he said.

"We should reapply our sunblock before we start stomping around in the desert," Melody said and pulled her tube from her backpack. Not denying the wisdom of that, the other two did the same.

Fed, watered, and UV protected, they began walking again. The walk was long and boring. For some reason they began to sing "The Song that Doesn't End" before Billie declared she'd strangle the next person who started it over. Twenty-questions didn't end well either. "You can't always be Spock, Billie," Melody groused. There was silence after this for a time.

"MMORPGs lie about how exciting quests are," Billie finally declared.

"Life isn't really like a video game. Not even for a Power Ranger," Melody pointed out. Tai suddenly flung an arm out and stopped them, even stepping back several feet as suddenly a ravine began opening the sand. The girls gave startled yelps as they scrambled back. "What just happened?" Mel demanded.

"And sometimes life *is* like a video game," Billie said. The crack extended as far as the eye could see. "What now?" she asked.

Tai pulled a flare from his back-pack and struck it. He tossed it into the crevasse, watching as the light eventually disappeared. It was too wide to jump, and even if he were to try and toss the girls over, he wasn't sure they'd make it.

Billie frowned. "Well, that's not good," she said. She took a handful of sand and began to sprinkle it around the edge of the crevasse.

"What are you doing?" Melody asked.

"They don't have copies of *Indiana Jones* on Terra Venture? I was trying to see if there was an invisible rock bridge like in *The Last Crusade*," Billie answered.

"Ooh," Melody said. She vaguely remembered the movies, but she probably only saw them before leaving Earth if at all.

"There may not be a rock bridge, but we do need faith," Tai suddenly.

"Well, I don't have any, so you can forget about me stepping into dead air," Billie declared immediately.

"C'mon, genius. Use that head of yours. Zordon hid his Staff pieces for us to find. He wouldn't exactly want us to fall to our deaths," Melody pointed out.

Billie took a deep breath and looked into the crevasse again. "Okay, you're right. But we should hedge out bets and all go together," she said and took Tai's hand in a death grip.

He nodded and held his other hand out to Mel. She took it. "No countdowns. Let's just go. Now!" she said and they all took a step into the void.

-x-

Alarms began going off in the Command Center. "Ay ay ay, Zordon!" A disc-headed robot threw up his arms and turned toward the interdimensional tube that housed the core essence of the Eltarin known as Zordon. "Some has breached the underground tunnels," he reported.

"The time must have come," Zordon stated.

"What's going on?" Jason asked.

Alpha hurriedly slipped in front of the viewing globe and struck an awkward pose to keep him from seeing what was happening. "There is nothing going on," he said despite the alarms still going off.

"It is all right, Alpha. Jason may watch," Zordon said.

"Ay ay ay," Alpha said and hurriedly cut off the alarms before any of the other rangers showed up.

Jason watched the scene in the viewing globe. "That's the one from before," he said, surprised.

"All is well, Jason," Zordon assured him. Jason nodded, watching the events unfolding on the viewing globe.

-x-

Tai, Billie, and Melody didn't fall to their doom. They didn't have a moment to be glad. As soon as they arrived in an underground cavern, they heard a rumble behind them. "Oh, frosted flakes," Billie gulped as



she turned her head.

"Run!" Tai pushed the girls in front of him as they began to outrun the giant boulder that was rolling down the tunnel behind them. Being usually klutzy and prone to falling down, Billie got her backpack snagged on a stalagmite. She managed to pull herself out of the straps but she went tumbling with a cry.

Tai glanced back. "Help her," he shouted at Melody. He took a deep breath and ran toward the boulder. Dredging up his strength again, he took a stance. He took a deep breath and blocked everything else out. The boulder didn't slow down.

Mel helped Billie to her feet as they watched Tai strike out with a fluid motion. He sent not only his genetic strength, but also his own energy into the rock through an open handed blow. It broke up and the momentum threw smaller, less dangerous rocks around him. Billie and Mel balled up to protect themselves.

Mel opened her eyes when it seemed at all the rocks quit falling. "Wow," she declared.

Tai shook out his hand with a wince. He saw them staring at him. He looked at what was left of the boulder. He rubbed the back of his neck as his ears turned red. "Um, Watanabe martial arts meets genetic enhancements," he said.

Melody suddenly started laughing. "I'm really starting to see what Lani likes about you so much," she said as she began walking down the rest of the tunnel.

Billie fell into pace with her. "That's our leader boy," she said. Tai glowered at their backs and continued to follow them. The tunnel let out into a spacious cavern. It looked empty except that the dust motes from the earlier rock explosion were revealing crisscrossing laser beams similar to those museums use for security. There were also big sections of ground missing.

Tai tossed a piece of boulder rubble into the beams. As soon as it hit one, it exploded. "Well, this isn't good," he said. "They appear to be stationary, but not even Watanabe martial arts would help me get through there," he said.

"And I get even more spastic when I'm nervous," Billie said. "Being exploded by laser beams is definitely a nerve wracking prospect."

"Yeah, but I think I see a lever at the other end of the cavern. Maybe it turns these off. If we can get over there," Melody said.

"I see it, too," Tai said. "Billie--"

"Yeah, yeah, I know. My invisibility refracts light. I'm the only one that can make it to the lever. I just have to be careful of the enormous hole in the floor and stay invisible long enough to make it," she said, taking a few deep breaths.

Melody put a hand on her shoulder. "When you have to jump, just aim. You never miss. Just imagine that your body is something you're throwing," she said encouraging.

Billie nodded. "Here goes nothing," she said and turned invisible and began running. She could feel the heat from the lasers but they didn't register her as she bent them off course. She only paused to take careful aim when she had to jump a crack or crevasse. The Cavern was huge and she wasn't sure she was going to make it. She was beginning to feel herself become drained as she gave a last desperate long jump. She crashed into the pillar where the lever stood and pulled just as she became visible again.

"Who!" Melody cheered as she and Tai began to make her way through the cavern. She gave Billie a hug when they made it. "You did it," she said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Get off me," Billie grumbled. Mel laughed but let her go.

"You didn't glitch once. Good job," Tai said. She managed a wan smile. "But we're not done yet," he said and glanced toward the archway that had opened up when Billie pulled the lever.

Billie was gulping water she pulled out of Melody's backpack. She wiped her mouth and put it back. "Well, I am invisible'd out. It's Melody's turn to get us through," she said.

Melody decided a drink of water was a good idea when her mouth went dry. "I don't have any genetic abilities," she said. "So maybe it'll be easy," she said hopefully.

"Absolutely," Billie agreed.

"Right," Tai added.

Knowing that it not going to be easy, Mel led the way through a short arched tunnel that went vaguely downhill. There was a set a spiral stone steps that led them down further. She gave a yelp when they eventually came to the end of the stairway and the floor disappear. Tai quickly steadied all of them.

"I doubt there's a stone bridge here either," Billie said drily.

Tai looked around. "There are ledge along the outer walls and what appear to be vines. Some of them seem to be trapezes," he said.

"And another lever," Melody said. "And the occasional flat topped pillar. This is definitely my room," she said.

"Are you nuts?" Billie asked.

"Are you sure?" Tai asked the same time.

Melody nodded. "Yes," she said to both questions. "Got any strength left?" she asked Tai.

"A bit," he answered.

"Give me a boost. That vine there," she said. There a vine just out of reach. Tai knelt and joined his hands. She put her foot in them, and he helped her jump off. She flew through the air and grabbed at the

vine. Her momentum carried her forward. She let go and landed on a couch sized slab of rock suspended by more vines. Running back and forth she began to rock it.

"She is nuts. She's absolutely insane," Billie declared, watching with her heart in her throat.

Once she had enough momentum going in the direction she needed it, Mel perched on the end of the slab and jumped. She landed on one of the ledges of the outer wall. She stood there, catching her breath. It was a thin ledge and not very long. After her heartbeat and breathing settled. She grabbed the vine that was hanging there and began to run before swinging across.

For a few moments there was no other way across swinging from vine to vine. After the last vine, she launched herself toward pillar that had a very small surface area. She landed in a crouch and flailed her arms to catch her balance.

"Be careful!" Tai shouted.

"It's ok! I'm almost there!" Melody shouted back. She stood up and jumped through the air. She freefell for quite some time before she caught hold of another vine and climbed back up.

"Are you trying to give people heart attacks!" Billie demanded.

Mel's only response was a quick thumb up as she began to rock back and forth, getting her momentum going again. When it was sufficient she jumped onto another couch sized slab and began rocking it. A final leap from that one had her landing by the podium the lever sprouted from. She pulled it as she legs gave out and she collapsed on the ground. A wide stone bridge began stretching across the space. "I'll just lay here and die until you guys catch up," she muttered. That was the single most terrifying thing she had ever done.

"Guess growing up in the jungle has its uses," Tai remarked as he and Billie finally made it to the where she was sprawled. Finally, able to move she began to drink some water.

"Well, if my opinion matters, you're more than qualified to be a Power Ranger," Billie said and held a hand down to help to her feet.

Melody grinned as took the hand and hopped to her feet. "Maybe ol' Phantom knew what he was doing after all," she said.

"Let's rest here for a few minutes before going on," Tai said and rubbed his wrist. "We're almost there," he said. The girls agreed. They took the time to drink water, or coffee, and eat more granola to help recharge themselves.

When they passed through the final archway, the cavern they were in was expansive, but there was a ceiling and a whole floor. Floating in the middle of the cavern was an ornate piece of white Staff. It appeared to be the very top of the Staff. "After all that, isn't this a little too easy?" Billie asked suspiciously.

"Yes. We were given Morph capability for a reason," Tai agreed. He twisted his wrists and made his

cuffs appear. Billie and Melody followed suit and they started toward the Staff piece.

Shimmering from invisibility was a massive sized monster that was a bit like an insect and a rat maze at the same time. From its fingers it began firing metallic spikes at them. There was nowhere to take cover they just had to out run and Morph on the fly. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus!" Tai shouted.

"Pterodactyl!" Melody called.

"Smilodon!" Billie said, though she almost said Triceratops. They came running out of the dust his attacks caused. The suits of the original Earth Power Rangers encasing them fully, feeling both familiar and alien at the same time.

"Power Daggers!" the Yellow Ranger threw the daggers once they appeared in her hands. They hit dead one.

"Power Bow!" the Pink Ranger jumped and drew back her arm shooting a pink bolt of energy at the Guardian.

"Power Sword!" the Red Ranger ran in and but everything he had into a massive swing that went straight through the Guardian and carried him to the other side of the cavern with his own momentum. The Guardian blew up behind him.

When the dust began to settle, the weapons and Morphs faded. Tai, Billie, and Melody walked toward the Staff piece and each grabbed hold without saying another word between them.

-xTo Be Continuedx-

## 29 - Morphin' Legacy

### Angel Grove, 2006

Tai, Billie, and Melody grasped the Staff piece in their hands. They felt a strange lurch but otherwise nothing changed. They appeared to not have moved at all. They were in the same cavern as they were before, in the exact same spot as well. The only thing different is that the Phantom Ranger was standing before them.

"Welcome back," he quipped. "Believe it or not, I actually watched all that live. It was great," he said and gave them a thumbs up with a hand that wasn't holding another silver case.

"I can believe it," Tai said.

"Me, too," Billie said and let go of the Staff piece.

Phantom Ranger chuckled. Mel wasn't sure what they meant so she didn't have anything to say on that. "Are we back?" she asked.

"You are," he said.

Suddenly in teams of threes and fours, the other Rangers began arriving. They all looked around, a little shell shocked, but all in one piece. There was a cacophony of odd pinging sounds as their Morphers began ejecting used up Morph Keys. The little figures had all gone gray and were smoking before they disintegrated into nothing.

"Well, that was interesting," Danny said.

Phantom Ranger clapped his hands together. "I know you're all probably tired, but we still have work to do," he said.

"Weirdly enough, I'm not tired at all," Nathan commented. There was a murmur of agreement.

"What do we do next?" Autumn asked.

Phantom was opening his case. "Good question. Staff bearers, give your pieces to Taran. Meanwhile, the rest of you have monsters to defeat," he said.

"Me?" Taran asked. Suddenly the staff piece in his hand began to glow. The other pieces suddenly flew toward him and began floating around him. He couldn't have let go of the staff piece in his hand if his life depended on it. The pieces began to spin around him so fast even he couldn't keep up with them. A whirlwind of power began to spin around and pieces of the Staff began to connect to each other, glowing with a blinding intensity.

Then there was this moment of clarity for Taran and he stopped resisting the pull. He knew what had to happen. He flung out a hand and the case the Phantom Ranger was holding began to float. Three sets of five and one set of three Morph Keys spread out amongst them. And they disappeared. Except Lammy. "Go to Griff," Taran told her.

Even as a Morph Key bonded to her Morpher, she knew it wasn't time for her to use it. She knew why he was sending her to Griff. She gave him a smile. "See, you can't deny your power anymore. Widow will be furious when she comes back and finds out," she said.

Taran's eyes had gone white, and his hair was beginning to gleam a white-gold. "I almost look forward to it. Hurry. Griff's waiting for you," he said. She nodded and disappeared in a wisp of gold smoke.

Taran turned his head toward Phantom Ranger. "You should go. A hologram isn't going to protect you from what's coming next," he said. His voice was beginning to sound hollow, as if coming from far away.

"Is there anyone who hasn't figured it out yet?" Phantom grumbled and teleported out of the underground cavern, leaving Taran alone with the storm of power he and the Staff were creating to reconnect the universe with the Morphing Grid.

-x-

Sora found himself thrown through space and landed three times. He'd been split apart without making it happen himself. Each of the clones looked at each other and looked around. They hadn't arrived at the scene of battle. Instead he saw the Repulsa sisters holding hands and levitating off the ground as they chanted. The cherry trees were glowing and there was a whirlpool of purple-pink energy below them.

He didn't have time to wonder why he'd been sent here when suddenly Rio arrive with a troop of Bone Drones. "What is this?" she asked and laughed derisively. "Do you pathetic sisters really think your powers are any match for mother and the Soul Stone?" she asked. "Tear apart their little spell circle," she commanded the Bone Drone.

Each Sora rushed forward and stood between the enemy and the sisters. "You'll have to get through me first," all three of him said at once.

Rio laughed again. "Last I checked, Triforian mutt, you Power Rangers can't even Morph," she said smirking.

"Check again," the central Sora said. The three of him twisted their wrists and made their cuffs appear. "It's Morphin Time! Legacy form! Omega Ranger!"

"Legacy form! Sigma Ranger!"

"Legacy form! Zeta Ranger!"

He brought his wrists together and they Morphed. One of him formed a white and navy power suit with a shield piece emblazoned with a golden omega symbol. A police-themed helmet formed around his head. One of him formed a purple-ish silver and indigo power suit with a sigma emblazoned on a chest piece

and a slightly more U.F.O.-looking police helmet formed. The last of him formed a dark gunmetal and black power suit with a golden zeta symbol on the chest piece. The helmet that formed was more streamlined than the other two.

Rio was taken aback. "How is that possible? What are those suits?" she demanded.

"Protect the sisters from the Bone Drones, I'll handle Rio," Omega Ranger told the others.

"You don't have to say it," Sigma said, and broke off to engage a mass of Drones. He dove in and began kicking and punching, luring them far enough away to give the sisters some breathing room, but not so far that he couldn't make it back if he needed to. He popped the throttle on the device that had appeared on his wrist and gave it three sharp twists. "Fist of Thunder!" he hit the ground, and a massive explosion of energy raced through and exploded around the Drones.

"We're you," Zeta added and diverged to do the same. He also gave himself enough room to do what he needed to do. He popped the throttle on the device that appeared on his wrist. "Gravitation Pull!" The Drones suddenly found themselves being drawn toward him and they fought it. He made a fist and the energy bubble he'd created popped and exploded outwards, taking the Drones along as well.

Rio looked at Omega warily. She attacked. He blocked. She was fast and strong, but he was able to keep up with her for the most part. They kicked out and sent each other flying through the air. They landed and tumbled. They scrambled to their feet. Rio held her hand in a gun shape and pointed it at the sky. Knowing that wasn't good, Omega popped the throttle on the device that had formed on his wrist. He gave it three sharp cranks. "Reality Warp!" Time slowed down around him and he ran forward.

Both feet landed against her chest as time caught up with him. When she landed she made a rut in the ground until she hit the barrier the cherry trees, which made her bounce off in a new direction. She snarled as she got to her feet. "Is that how you treat a girl?" she demanded.

"I'm an equal opportunity Power Ranger," Omega quipped.

Rio growled and began to glow as she powered up, wearing even less she had been, a strange helmet covered her head and two wicked looking blasters appeared in her hand. "Then I won't hold back any more," she said and began firing.

-x-

Winter, Wood, Nathan, Manny, and Chloe appeared near the airport. Between the Senturions and their two helpers, they'd managed to get the saxophone monster, Saksor, away from the main hub of the airport and were now engaging him and Bone Drones at an old airstrip nearby.

There was a momentary silence when the monster and the Drones noticed their arrival. The four figures battling also stopped and regrouped back to them. "Took you long enough, little brother," Red Senturion declared.

"Yeah, well, we're here now," Wood said.

"Is everything fixed now?" Blue Senturion asked.

"Not quite, but their working on it," Manny answered.

"Thank you all for your help, but it's time to retreat," Win said, including the martial artist and the ninja in this statement.

Mily Bly looked them over skeptically. "No offense, mate, it wasn't too long ago you had to beat a hasty retreat," she pointed out.

"It's been longer than you think," Nathan said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Nyo asked.

"It means don't worry about it and get out of here," Chloe answered.

"Watch out!" Manny warned, the Bone Drones and Saksor had gotten over their momentary confusion and Saksor was sending a blast of sonic energy at them. That sent them all scrambling.

"What was all that big talk?" Red Senturion asked.

"We were getting to it. Don't be too shocked," Wood said. He made his cuffs appear, now blue. Manny, Chloe, Nathan, and Winter did was well.

"It's Morphin' Time! Legacy Form!" Winter called out.

"Shift into Turbo!" Wood called out.

Winter brought his cuffs together to activate the Morph sequence. Digitizing around him was the classic uniform of a Turbo Ranger. "Red Turbo Ranger!"

Wood activated his Morph. "Blue Turbo Ranger!"

Chloe activated her Morph. "Pink Turbo Ranger!"

Nathan activated his Morph. "Green Turbo Ranger!"

Manny activated her Morph. "Yellow Turbo Ranger!"

Red Senturion, TJ Johnson, former Red Turbo Ranger, and Blue Senturion, Justin Stewart, former Blue Turbo watched in something akin to amazement. "Now, why would that be shocking?" Red asked.

"That's awesome!" Blue shouted. "Oh, shoot," Bone Drones were starting to converge. "Strategic retreat," he said. He moved quickly, grabbed the ninja chick by the arm and teleported.

"Let's go, Nyo," Red said and corralled the younger man, teleporting away with him.



Saksor tooted an order to the Bone Drones and they began to attack in earnest. Red pulled a blaster shaped like a car from his hip. "Auto Blaster!" He began firing as he fought off Drones that got to close.

Blue wanted to revel in how cool he thought being a Turbo Ranger was, but he really didn't get the chance. He jumped high when a Drone tried to pounce on him. He landed on the shoulders of another one and balanced precariously. He pulled the Auto Blaster from his hip and began firing from his perch. "Man, this fantastic," he said and jumped off the Drone and fired at its back.

Pink stood waiting for the Drones to come at her. "Don't be fooled by the change on the outside. I'm still tough as ever on the inside," she said. She made herself dense and head-butted a Drone with a sickeningly loud crack. With her solid weight behind her, she made her way through the minions and when she couldn't hold the density any more, she pulled her Auto Blaster and began firing.

Green flipped over their heads, landing behind them, kicking them in their backs, making them stumble. He flipped again and stayed in the air. "You see it, right. Flying Turbo Ranger," he said and pulled his Auto Blaster and began firing.

Yellow sped along. "Turbo speed Yellow Ranger at your service," she said and pulled her Auto Blaster when she skidded to a stop and began firing.

"All together now!" Red said. He pulled something on the end of his Auto Blaster and a tiny turbine began to spin, powering it up. The others did the same. "Auto Blasters Turbo Mode, Fire!" They aimed at the monster.

Saksor unleashed a sonic blaster that met the powered up laser fire. The result was an explosion that didn't make it to him. He tooted his laughter of victory.

"It's not over yet," Red warned him. "Turbo Robotic Arsenal Mobilizer!" A small vehicle sped toward them, seemingly appearing some nowhere. It held their personal weapons. They picked them up. "Turbo Lightning Sword!" Red head a sword.

"Turbo Hand Blasters!" Blue held two large barrel blue blasters.

"Turbo Thunder Cannon!" Green held a large laser weapon.

"Turbo Star Chargers!" Yellow said and held two devices with electrical conductors on them.

"Turbo Wind Fire!" Pink had a laser shooter shaped like a bow with two barrels.

Saksor took a deep breath and blew again. This time the energy from the blast was enough to knock them off their feet and explode the world around them.

-x-

Randi, Green Senturion and Yellow Senturion had managed to lure Zyrinoc away from the little laundry district and toward a more open space, but now they found themselves surrounded by Bone Drones. Randi was running low on energy and the slightly outdated tech of the Senturions weren't faring too well

either.

Lani, Melody, Danny, Zara, and Tori arrived in a flash. "Oh, back for more punishment?" Zyrinoc croaked in his gravelly voice.

"Oh, thank heavens," Randi said in a whoosh.

Yellow Senturion kicked a Bone Drone in the head and made her way to them. "Glad to see," she said.

"Is the Grid fixed?" Green Senturion asked as they regrouped with the new arrivals.

"We got a guy working on it," Danny answered.

"Don't take this the wrong way or anything, but why are you here then?" Randi asked.

"Who'd take that the wrong way?" Zara asked.

"It's covered. You should retreat for now," Lani said.

"Good idea. Come on, Randi," Yellow said. Before Randi could ask any more questions, she and the Senturions teleported away.

Zyrinoc scoffed. "What good are a bunch of girlies going to be?" he asked.

"I ain't a girlie," Danny said.

"And you best not underestimate girlies," Tori warned him.

"We'll have to educate you on girl, and Danny, power," Mel stated.

"Bone Drones! Attack!" Zyrinoc ordered in response to that threat.

Lani twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Legacy Form!"

Danny twisted his wrists. "Kick into Overdrive!" The others also made their cuffs appear.

Lani brought her cuffs together and Morphed into a red and white power suit. "Red Overdrive Ranger!"

Danny brought his cuffs together and a blue and white power suit. "Blue Overdrive Ranger!"

Tori morphed into a pink and white power suit. "Pink Overdrive Ranger!"

Zara morphed into a black and white power suit. "Black Overdrive Ranger!"

Mel morphed into a yellow and white power suit. "Yellow Overdrive Ranger!"

Car-themed helmets formed as well as a large insignia on their chests. The Bone Drones didn't hesitate

to attack.

Yellow bounced on the toes of her feet for a moment. "You guys have no idea what I've through today. You might want to run away. No? Okay," she then kicked out, coming off the ground, her foot connecting with the Drone that came nearest to her first with the intent to harm. She twisted her body and spun through the air, landing behind the others. "Drive Defender!" she pulled out her side arm blaster and began firing.

Black put her hands on her hips. "We haven't met yet, but I'm afraid our acquaintance is going to be short and brutal," she said. The Drones were not intimidated. They came for her. With a flourish she put her hands up and flicked her wrists. A barrage of debris pummeled into them. Then she dove in, kicking and hitting her way through. One got lucky and managed to knock her off her feet. She fired her sidearm weapon at them even as she flew through the air.

Blue threw up a force-field that had the Drones crashing into. "Ha-ha. My bad," he said and dropped the field. He punched a Boned Drone in the face and flipped another one over his shoulder. He put a hand on his side arm, "Driver Defender Sword Mode!" He pulled out the short bladed weapon and used it, slashing and jabbing the Drones.

Pink found herself unable to actually use her genetic power since her helmet didn't open. "Oh, well. I got on fine before I could burst ear drums," she said. She dodged a Bone Drone attack and ducked, sweeping feet out from under them. She jumped back up and turned a backflip. She straddled the shoulders of a Drone and pulled out her weapon and began firing. She cracked the Drone she was riding on in the head with the butt of the blaster and rolled to her feet after he crumpled.

Red jumped into the action immediately. She drew her side-arm in Sword Mode. She slashed her way through the Drones. When they thought they might possibly dodge or move out of her reach, she taught them differently bending and stretching herself to inhuman degrees. "Overcharge!" she said and they charged their weapons. "Fire!"

As a group they fired on Zyrinoc. The monster had not been idle. He'd been taking the distraction the Drones to his advantage. He smashed his charged weapon into the ground. Both attacks hit home, practically exploding the world around them.

"Drive Lance!" Red summoned as she got back to her feet.

"Drive Slammer!" Black summoned.

"Drive Vortex!" Blue summoned.

"Drive Claws!" Yellow summoned.

"Drive Geyser!" Pink summoned.

-x-

AJ Scott, his friend Damien Henderson, the Black Senturion and the Pink Senturion managed to lead the

melted vinyl Kordec away from the area around the dojo. Still, the monster was tough. One blast had all but crippled Damien when his animal spirit, the green-blue lion as large as an SUV had taken the brunt of it. He cried out, clutching his chest and fell to his knees.

AJ ran to him, skidding to a stop. "I'm okay," Damien assured him. "But I need to heal," he said, meaning he couldn't call his animal spirit out again for a while.

"Would be good if some Power Rangers made a handy, just in the nick of time appearance," AJ commented.

Pink and Black Senturion stood in front of the two for cover firing on the Bone Drones that had also been summoned. "Have a little faith," Pink said.

"That's what Power Rangers do," Black agreed.

"Yeah, we know," AJ said in a way that earned him curious looks from the two Senturions.

"Did someone ask for a handy, just in the nick of time appearance?" Fox asked. He, Tai, Billie, Holly, Autumn arrived on the scene.

"Why me again?" Holly murmured.

"You'll be fine," Autumn assured her.

Billie blew her bangs out of her face. "If I'm unceremoniously magically transported one more time," she grumbled.

"Take them to the Command Center. They're exhausted," Tai said to the two Senturions.

"Are you sure?" Black asked.

"Is everything back to normal?" Pink asked.

"That is a long story and we don't have the time," Billie said.

The Senturions nodded and took possession of the two younger men and teleported.

"All right, monster, it's time for you to hit the road," Tai said.

Kordec scoffed. "I'm so afraid I'm shaking," he said and his vinyl began to vibrate.

Tai twisted his wrists making his cuffs appear. The others did the same. "It's Morphin' Time! Legacy Form!"

"Get in Gear!" Billie added.

Tai Morphed into a red power suit with white seat belt straps and number shaped eagle on its chest and

eagle and vehicle motif on the helmet. "RPM Ranger Red!"

Billie Morphed into a blue power suit with a number shaped lion on the chest and a lion and vehicle motif on the helmet. "RPM Ranger Blue!"

Holly Morphed into a yellow power suit with a number shaped bear on the chest and a bear and vehicle motif on the helmet. "RPM Ranger Yellow!"

Autumn Morphed into a green power suit with a number shaped shark on the chest and a shark and vehicle themed helmet. "RPM Ranger Green!"

Fox Morphed into a black power suit with a number shaped wolf on the chest and a wolf and vehicle motif on the helmet. "RPM Ranger Black!"

The Morph sequence protected them from and deflected the sound bomb that the monster had unleashed. "That wasn't quite expected. Bone Drones! Get them!" The Drones attacked.

Black ducked low and kicked out and felt a moment of disorientation when the tires on the top of his boots proved to be functional. They spun him around in several wild spirals that took down a swath of the Drones. He got dizzy to his feet when he stopped. "That was bloody wild ride. I like it," he said. He pulled a laser from his hip. He fired it several times before pulling something else from his belt. He inserted it into the blaster. "Nitro Sword!" when the blaster formed a blade. "This is more like it," he said.

Green dodged a blow, and did a backflip, kicking another under the chin. Except the suit wanted to go fast and she found herself doing a few more backflips and kicking out Chun Li style. She pulled her side arm when she righted herself again. "Nitro Blaster!" and began firing. She made out like she was blowing on the barrel. "Keep the change, you filthy animals," she said.

"What part of 'I'm not a Power Ranger,' isn't clear?" Yellow wondered out loud. She squeaked and rolled into a ball. She kept rolling like a tire and bowled over several Drones before she was able to get to her feet. "But I'm starting to get used to it," she added. She drew her Nitro Blaster and began firing.

Blue pulled the weapon from her holster and converted it to its sword form. She turned invisible, and started to dash through the Drones, but her boots also had minds of their own and took her a bit too fast. "Ack!" She managed to accomplish her goal of striking down the enemy but when she went to stop, she glitched and went tumbling through the air fully visible. "I'm okay," she said when she landed. She shook her head. "Wow," she said. Whoever designed these suits was amazing.

Red Wasn't having quite as much trouble controlling his suit. With his Nitro Sword, he was able to control the speed of the suit through sheer willpower, letting it loose when he needed it to, keeping it at bay the other times. Now, with the Drones correctly assessing him as the biggest threat decided to surround him, he let loose. He turn-slashed and the suit sped him around in a series of spirals that sent Bone Drones flying. When he stopped he looked at the monsters. "Nitro Blasters! All together!" he said, converting the sword back to its blaster form.

The Rangers came together and fired on the monster just as he unleashed another sound blast. The two forces met, but the Rangers were already gearing up for the next face. The emblems on their chests

glowed as weapons began to appear.

"Street Saber!" Red summoned a sword.

"Turbo Cannon!" Blue summoned a cannon that should probably weigh more than it felt like it did given its rather large size.

"Zip Charger!" Yellow summoned the somewhat car-shaped device.

"Bridge Axe!" Green summoned the green double-bladed weapon.

"Rocket Blaster!" Black summoned a large black blaster shaped device.

Kordec was also gearing up for his next attack, vibrating so much that he was just a black blur.

-x-

## **The Moon**

Lammy appeared beside her brother on the dark side of the Moon. She wore her full scorpion armor. So did he. "What took you so long?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Oh, you know, questing through time for a piece of a powerful staff that can restore the balance of good and evil in the universe. Nothing much," she answered.

"Uh-huh. We doing this?" he asked, gesturing to the darkness of space beyond the moon.

"Do we have a plan?"

"Board the ship, beat up a bunch of people, find Finster, blow up the ship, leave," he explained.

"So, it's up to me to fill in the details as usual," she said drily. "Hold on to your mace," she said. She gripped the void in front of her and began to pull with all her strength. When she had a seam, Griff grabbed one side and she switched both hands to the other. There was a sound like silk ripping and through the mildly glowing edges of the rip they'd just made, they could see the fortress ship.

"Once we're aboard, you find Finster, I'll find the engine. Once you have him, port to me," she instructed.

"Right," he said.

They disappeared from the surface on the moon and appeared in the corridor of a castle-shaped space-ship. Lammy tapped on the walls delicately until she found an access panel. She opened it up and saw that they needed a card to access the internal computer. She put her hand on the card slot and sent a little jolt of magic into it.

The computer screen beeped and she was granted access to the layout to the ship. "Finster's being kept in the dungeon. The engine of the ship in this central section. Hurry and get to Finster and meet me

there," she said.

The computer beeped again and alarms began to go off. "They know we're here," Griff said.

"Yep. Go!" Lammy said.

Griff nodded and began running in the opposite direction she was going in. They ran up against resistance fairly quickly. Bone Drones and aliens in armor that marked them part of Riti's army put a blockade in front of Lammy. "Halt!" a rhino-headed alien said.

Lammy skid to a stop and put up her hands, fists clenched. "I don't surrender," she said. She opened her fists and launched energy blasts at them. She jumped over them and tried to continue on her way. A lithe woman with blue scales tackled her from behind. The sudden appearance of black wings knocked the woman free.

Lammy turned, holding out a hand and a rather large double bladed battle axe appeared in her hand as her visage changed completely. The scaly woman hissed. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"Me? I am Lammy," she answered. The scaly woman drew a sword. Lammy spun her axe and whirled, coming off the ground. She down swung the axe hard. The scaly woman tried to block with the sword, but it wasn't a match for the axe.

Lammy shifted forms again and began running now at top speed, avoiding the enemy where she could, engaging where she couldn't. It would still be tricky to get to where she needed to go. Without having been there, visual access or a person to anchor her, she couldn't port to it. She had to go the long way.

-X-

## **Palace on the Moon**

Riti had now fully captured the palace. Only her people and Bone Drones were in attendance. She was watching over the Earth with a gloating air. "My queen," a simpering man in a hooded robe bowed to her. "The fortress has been breached," he told her.

Riti curled her lip in a sneer. "By whom?" she asked.

"It is unclear," he answered.

"The only possibilities are Goldarr and Scorpina's youngest brats. They must have gone after the rat man. Dispose of them," she said dismissively. Her main concern wasn't the fortress where she had an army. It was earth and her nieces. "Just what do they think they can do?" she wondered out loud. Her daughter was putting up a rather pitiful front against the trio that was guarding them.

"Omomomo," she said, rubbing her forehead. "My head is starting to ache. This brat. And she's talking about sharing the glory," she scoffed. "Looks like I have to handle this myself," she said. She disappeared in a wisp of purple smoke.

-xTo Be Continuedx-



## 30 - Graduation Day

### Cavern beneath the Command Center

Taran, due to the connection with the Staff, could see everything that was happening. The Power Rangers had been given access to power suits from the past and near and not too distant future. The Turbo suits for Winter, Wood, Nathan, Tori and Chloe. Not long from now, there would be Overdrive Rangers and Lani, Danny, Melody, Tori and Zara were borrowing their power. Among the Morphin' Legacy of the future there would be RPM Rangers and Tai, Billie, Holly, Autumn, Fox were borrowing from that time. As for the three suits that Sora wore, he had no idea the Legacy behind them, but Taran did.

He also understood that these things eventually fade and he'd no more of what would happen than anyone else, but for now he seemed to know everything.

Power was spinning through the cavern like a tempest. He could almost feel the barrier between the universe and the Morphing Grid. He just needed something to direct the power. Three somethings. The triplets would be his conduit. He smiled and prepared to release the power to them when the time was right.

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Kordec was nothing more than a black blur. "I don't need my computer to know that this one is going to be bad," Blue commented.

"Indeed not," Yellow agreed.

"Let's not just stand around talking about it," Black urged.

"He's vibrating faster now!" Green shouted.

"All right, let's finish it now!" Red said.

"Right!" They agreed and came together to combine weapons. "RPM Enforcer!"

Red slipped a device into the Enforcer. "Engine Cell Activate!" The weapon charged.

"Fire!"

The Enforcer fired at the same time as Kordec let loose his attack. The two forces met and pushed against each other, each side giving their all. The attack finally hit home and the monster exploded.

-x-

Overdrive Red opened the prongs of her weapon and a blade jutted out. She ran forward, jumped and spun crashing the Lance into the monster. Black spun around and tossed the wheel-themed hammer with everything she had and directed its path to crash into the monster several times before bringing it back to her. Blue wasn't far behind with his attack, activating the hand-held wind turbine and punching with it. Which then brought Yellow behind, lashing out with the scoops on her hands ending in an uppercut that had him sparking wildly. Pink followed up by cooling him with liquid laser fire.

Having taken enough punishment Zyrinoc roared a rocky roar and lashed out with his weapons, throwing each of them off their feet. He began to swing the weapon again. Black lashed out with her hammer and telekinesis once more.

Red sprang to her feet. "Defender Vest!" She summoned a chest piece that reflected the speedometer-like insignia of the power suit. "Drill Blaster!" She summoned a large heavy weapon with a drill head that she had to stabilize on her thigh. The other Rangers lined up behind her to get out of the way. "Spiral Shot!" The drill head began to turn and she fired the weapon as an energy blast shot toward the monster.

Weakened and unable to gather enough energy to defend, the monster was powerless against the attack. The power of the drill exploded into the monster.

-X-

Saksor got a little cocky after his last attack and tooted his own horn a little too loudly. He really thought he'd done it that time. "Psyche!" Turbo Pink sprang out of the dust, firing the Wind Fire at the monster making him give and discordant squeal.

Yellow sped up and pressed the Star Chargers against the monster. "Clear!" she called and the electrical discharge sent the monster stumbling back.

"Say hello to my little friend!" Green said in a really bad accent and fired his Thunder Cannon at the monster.

Blue aimed both the Hand Blasters at monster. "Han didn't shoot first. I did!" he began shooting the monster.

With a full charge of the Lightning Sword. He ran forward, crouched slightly and slashed, unloading an electrical pulse that almost finished the monster. But it didn't. In retaliation, he trumpeted loudly again. "Turbo R.A.M. Cannon!" Red called and the Rangers gathered to assemble the cannon. "Fire!" They fired on the monster, exploding him hopefully once and for all.

-X-

## **Riti's Fortress Ship**

Lammy was almost to the engine room when she came upon the worst round of resistance yet. There was a line of soldiers with shields and lasers pointed at her. They fired as soon as they saw her. She braced herself for the worst, squeezing her eyes shut. When nothing came, she opened her eyes.

Griff was standing in front of her, holding his mace. The spiked ball was absorbing the energy fire. Finster was cowering behind Lammy. Griff grunted as the mace became heavier and heavier. Seeing that nothing was happening, the soldiers stopped firing. Griff's move was swift. Lammy ducked and pulled Finster down with her. He swung the mace and sent the energy back toward them.

They and the entrance to the engine room exploded. Lammy got to her feet and ran in. There was heavy damage and alarms were beginning to flare. A voice told them that a critical event was eminent and they should evacuate the ship. "Good job," she told her brother.

Griff shrugged. "It's what I do," he said.

"Hurry. Take Finster somewhere safe. I need to help the sisters," she said. Griff nodded and the three of them disappeared.

-x-

The three Sora's were having a tough time fending off Rio's laser fire and the Bone Drones she occasionally sic'd on him. Zeta was surrounded by Bone Drones and Sigma was trying to help him. Omega was facing down Rio herself.

"I have to admit, that was impressive, but even three of you aren't a match for me," she said. She held a gun pointed at him.

A flying pool of a metallic substance crashed into, knocking her backward. The metallic substance solidified into a Power Ranger with a silver and black power suit, the Overdrive insignia on the chest, neon orange piping, blue shoulder guards and a silver helmet with a visor lined in orange and an antenna. "What about if I come out to play?" the Mercury Ranger asked with Lammy's voice.

"Drive Detector!" she summoned a weapon that was vaguely reminiscent of a metal detector mixed with a laser blaster and used it to help Zeta and Sigma with the Bone Drones.

"Thanks, I owe you," the three Rangers said as one.

Suddenly a blast of pink energy exploded around them, and it was all the four of them could do to protect the sisters.

Riti walked out of the dust. "I shouldn't have to be here myself," she sneered at her daughter.

Rio turned red. "I had this covered," she snarled.

Riti flicked a hand, and Rio went flying through the air. She crashed through the trees and wasn't seen again.

"That was your own daughter," Mercury said weakly as she got to her feet.

Riti's eyes were glowing pink now. "I have no use for the useless," she said.

Suddenly, their Morphers began to discharge the Morph Keys and the Morphs faded.

"I don't think this is good," one Sora commented. The other two shook their heads.

"Go to them. I'll hold her off as long as I can," Lammy said.

Sora wanted to argue, but decided not to. The three of him summoned his swords and stood as the last bastion for the trio still incanting, seemingly oblivious to what was going on around them.

Riti scoffed. "As if a baby like you is any match for me," she said to Lammy. She held up a hand and threw an energy blast at her.

Once again, Lammy was saved by her brother appearing at just the right time. He managed to turned the energy of the blast back on Riti, wounding her slightly. But in the process his Mace was exploded.

Riti was getting to retaliate but the two siblings and the three Sora's disappeared. Now there was nothing between the sisters and her. She grinned wildly. "Now, my dear nieces, it's time to finish this," she said.

She held up a hand and the Soul Stone floated there. She channeled her power through it and sent a devastating blast toward them.

-X-

Sora and Lammy weren't the only ones whose temporary Morphs gave out. Even as they thought they were winning, the Power Rangers found themselves discharging the Morph Keys. Though the three monsters had exploded, they grew from new eggs into new monsters. Lithe creatures with smooth features and hands that seemed to be the subwoofers of a speaker. Now defenseless, when the monsters used their new and improved sonic attacks on them, they were nearly out of the game.

Chloe had stood in front of everyone else with her body as dense as she could possibly make it, but she didn't have much surface and her clothes ended up looking worse for the wear.

Saksor laughed. "So much for all your fancy wardrobe changes. All you did was make me stronger," he said.

"Morph or no morph, we won't let you and your master win," Win, who was relatively unscathed from going intangible, told him. The other Rangers regrouped.

Saksor laughed and held out his arms and sent another blast toward them. They hit a powerful magical shield that reflected the blast back on him. He sparked but didn't go down. "What happened?" he demanded.

"Good question," Lammy said. "How did I get here?" she wondered. Then she and the other Rangers felt it.

Win made his cuffs appear. "It's Morphin' Time!" Stygimoloch! Stygian Armor!"

"Smilodon!" Wood and Manny activated their Morphs.

"Pterodactyl!"

"Mastodon!"

"Velociraptor!"

Saksor momentarily stumbled back as the Rangers Morphed into their true selves. Their Power Coin began to glow and formed a link amongst them that centered on Green's Stygian Blade. The blade began to crackle with Power. Saksor through a blast of energy at him, but he put up his shield and ran forward.

With the combined power of his team, he ran slashed, slashed, slashed all around the monster. he turned his back on the monster and the monster exploded. This time the monster didn't get up.

-x-

Lani, Mel, and Tori took cover behind the force-field that Danny could generate and the psychic field that Zara threw up when the newly powered up Zyrinoc threw at them. It left Zara dizzy and she staggered back. Mel caught her. They stumbled to find cover.

Zyrinoc didn't give them a lot of time to recover and came at them with another attack. Wielding his Sword, a single Sora knocked it back toward him like a baseball. "Well, this a twist," he said, looking around in confusion.

"Welcome to the jam," Danny said and shook his hands out.

"No time for pleasantries," Lani said. She smiled thinly. "Let's find out what kind sound a sound monster makes when it dies," she suggested. She twisted her twisted her wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex! Power Armor!"

"Triceratops!"

"Pterodactyl!"

"Ceratosaurus!" When Sora morphed he split into three again. Their Power Coins formed a connection. A link to Red.

"Power Sword!" she summoned her Sword and held up her shield.

Seeing her coming, Zyrinoc attempted to throw small but powerful blasts at her. They bounced off her shield. Power was crackling around her blade. She angled her shield and actually used the power to bounce herself off the ground. Zyrinoc watched her fly over his head, twist her body and land slashing him. The Power of their combined energies exploding him and sending her tumbling. "Miscalculated that a bit," she groaned, but the monster was no more.

-X-

Though Tai, Billie, and Autumn had genetic abilities, there was nothing they could do against the power behind the new and improved Kordec's attack. Tai tried to shield Billie and Holly, but Fox and Autumn were on their own.

Kordec strutted around. "It's not even worth finishing you off. You are nothing now," he declared.

Tai turned toward him. He held out a hand and his red sheathed katana appeared in his hand. "Come over here and say that," he challenged. He pulled the blade from its sheath. "There's something you and all your ilk have forgotten here," he said and strode forward.

"Oh, and what's that?" Kordec asked, far from intimidated. "Do I have something in my teeth and you're bringing me a toothpick?" he asked.

"What's he doing?" Autumn gasped. Wide-eyed, Holly shook her head.

Billie and Fox were a little less concerned. "He's being Tai," Billie answered.

"That's what they forget. That's he's Tai," Fox explained.

Tai suddenly ran forward and slashed with his katana. The monster blocked, sending sparks shooting up. They eyeballed each other as they pushed against other, trying to get the upper hand. The monster grunted with the effort. He pushed forward with his other hand and released an attack.

Tai went with it, flying backward, he somersaulted and landed in a crouch. He stood when Taran materialized beside him. "No, they forget that Power Rangers never work alone," he said. He twisted his wrists. "It's Morphin' Time! Tyrannosaurus-Rex! Power Armor!"

"Triceratops!"

"Mastodon!"

"Stygimoloch!"

"Stegosaurus!"

Their Power Coins made a network of power that was centered on the Red Ranger and his Tyranno Sword.

Kordec backed up and started running away, but Red was running after him. Every now and then the monster would throw a pot shot over its shoulder but, Red brought up his shield. "What happened to all your big talk?" he asked.

"I was wrong! Just let me go!" Kordec answered.

"Not going happen," Red said. He pulled up short and threw his Sword with every ounce of his strength. It hit home and the monster exploded. Red turned his back and started walking back to the others.

-X-

Riti's victory was assured. There was nothing that could stop her now. She had the Soul Stone and her nieces pathetic power was nothing. She did not expect the sudden well of power below the trio to suddenly turn white-gold.

When she threw her attack, the sisters each held their free hands toward her. There a sound. A sudden, beautiful harmonious sound as the three sister's powers became synchronized. Another sound joined their unique tune as they channeled not only their Power but the power of Taran and Zordon's staff.

Riti's magic met their magic. They pushed against each other. "You can't win!"

"We already have," the sisters said with one voice. "And we always will. It is inevitable. Good-bye, Aunt," they said. The power pushed through and the Soul Stone shattered in an explosion that shook the very air for miles around.

Riti gasped. She retreated to her ship, unaware that it was just moments from exploding.

The sister's redirected the power upwards. The sky suddenly shimmered with a digital matrix as the access bridges to the Morphing Grid were restored. The Power suddenly winked out and the sisters collapsed. They remained in a heap beneath the cherry trees until Griff, Sora, and Tai found them later and let them rest at the house.

-X-

Tai looked over the sea of faces he'd just finished giving his Valedictorian speech to. He'd talked about change and growth. The memories made and the time to move forward with their lives. He'd changed dramatically since the beginning of the year. He didn't even recognize the gawky kid in his memories who was tongue-tied around any girl. The thought of giving that speech would have been enough to make him sick before. Now, he didn't even blink.

He wasn't the only one who'd changed. As he glanced at the faces in the crowd, the familiar ones belonging to the friends he'd never imagined he could make, he could see the changes in them as well.

The principal finished handing out the diplomas and mortarboards were being thrown into the air. There was supposed to a graduation party at the Youth Center, but the Power Rangers were going to meet at the Command Center first. But Tai had something to do even before that.

He found himself at the cherry trees, still wearing his gown.

"Look good on you," Zita said with a guarded air. She was tying some new talismans to the trees.

"You tried your best to make sure I wouldn't get to wear it," he said.

She gave a shrug. "I've learned my lesson," she said. "You won't have to worry about me anymore, but just remember that Roki and Widow were only going on a trip," she said.

Tai nodded. "I know. What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Going on a trip myself. See how Uncle Rito's doing. Then from there, who knows?" she shrugged again. "Good bye, Tai," she said. "It's been real," she said, unable to say that it was a pleasure to meet him or any other such pithy remarks.

"As real as it gets," Tai agreed, feeling exactly the same way. She nodded and disappeared in a wisp of purple smoke. He sighed, patting one of the trees and walked to his house to change.

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After the rangers had defeated the three monsters and returned to the Command Center, their Power Coins had ejected themselves from their cuffs and went dormant. Not even Taran was sure what that meant. Now they were locked away behind a glass display as the Rangers and their allies gathered.

Billie cornered Jason. He looked at her oddly. "I want to go to Eltar," she stated.

Jason cleared his throat. "Why are you telling me?" he asked.

"I'll tell you if you really want me to," she said.

Jason cleared his throat again. "What do your parents think about you going to an alien planet?" he asked.

"They think it's a fabulous idea," she said.

"Wait, you actually told them?"

She shrugged. "You haven't met my parents," she said.

"I will though," Jason said. She nodded. That sounded fine to her. She walked away to find Nathan. He and Wood were supposed to leave for their CPAC workshop thing soon.

"Maybe you should go to Eltar, too," Lammy told Taran, startling him out of his thoughts.

"Huh?" he asked. "Oh, right. No," he said shaking his head. Though he'd finally accepted his magical heritage, he wasn't super gung-ho about it yet. "What are you going to be doing now?" he asked, since technically she wasn't a Ranger anymore. None of them were.

"What I came back to Earth for to start with," she answered and didn't explain it to him. Instead she skipped over to Win and Autumn too Lammy's place beside Taran.

Lani, Manny, and Holly had their heads together. Manny was explaining happy but sad news to them. "You guys know I was only staying with Abby because my mom was working in France for a year, right?"



Well, she's been given a permanent position and she wants to me to come live with her," she said with a smile.

"That's so great! You missed her a lot," Lani said and gave her friend a hug.

Holly hugged them as well. "We'll miss you," she said.

"Oh, I'll miss you guys so much," Manny sniffed.

Tai finally arrived in the Command Center. "It's the man of the hour!" Sora shouted and that got everyone's attention. They started cheering for him.

Tai held his hands up and quieted them down. "Thank you, everyone," he said. "I'm going to try not to speechify. Just, thank you all for being my friends and team mates and saving the world with me," he said. There was another round of cheers. Lani hugged him around the waist and he squeezed her back. "Now, there's a whole building full of other kids who just graduated and are looking to celebrate. Let's go," he said.

The Command Center quickly emptied out. Tai gave Lani a brief kiss and assured her he'd be there in a few. She left only he, Jason and Beez in the Command Center. "Today might be a good day, and we diverted a disaster of epic proportions, but--" he started.

"But nothing. Today is not the day to worry about tomorrow," Jason said, clapping him on the shoulder. "Today you go to the Youth Center and celebrate with your friends and you forget all about what might be coming next," he instructed.

Tai managed a smile. "Okay. I get it. I'm going," he said and teleported.

Beez and Jason were left in silence. "Take your own advice," Beez said.

"You take my advice, too," he said with a grin.

"I'm a computer. I can have fun and work at the same time," she said with a shrug.

Jason nodded. He left the Command Center.

The storm was over for now. Or was it merely the eye of the hurricane? No one knew when the next wave would come, but life could not be lived in fear of what would next for the Power Rangers.

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